

The Lost Stories of Warwick Deeping

Volumes I-IX

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VOLUME TWO

THE LOST STORIES OF WARWICK DEEPING

Courage

By Warwick Deeping

"... He worked at it lovingly and with a kind of awe, for never in the old days had he painted as he was painting now. He called the picture 'Courage.'"



THE girl with the tawny hair straightened her tined back and leant for a moment on the handle of her hoe. She was earthing up potatoes in her garden on the side of the hill, where the brown and green lines ran up to meet the far-flung crimson of the western sun. Her eyes sought the sea, and from the sea they passed to the cove lying almost at her feet, with its grey half-circle of rocks capped by the brilliant green of grass and young bracken. The tide was rising sleepily in the cove, and flowing in to meet the green torrent of spring foliage that poured down the Millercombe Valley, smothering the cottages and flooding the steep sides of the hills.

Her blue eyes had a vacant, visionary look, but the lids drew nearer together as her gaze rested on Mart Point. She lifted her chin, and frowned slightly. A minute ago the rocks of Mart Point on the far side of the cove had been empty of all human interest, but now a figure was scrambling along them, a grey figure that was almost lost in the greyness of the rocks.

"He is there again."

She did not utter the words, though they sounded for her in the silence of her own thoughts. Nor had the man down yonder inspired her with anything more than a mere casual curiosity—until he had worried her a little by making her feel most strangely and unreasonably responsible. So far as she knew he had never seen her, though she had seen him in his comings and goings to and from the rocks of Mart Point. Perhaps she was

superstitious, or peculiarly sensitive, but the shadow thrown by the hill stretched out a great arm across the still waters of the cove.

She turned and went on with her work, but the movements of her hoe grew slower and less purposeful, and presently she stood motionless, staring at the ground.

"How absurd!"

She was being impelled down yonder by some strange persuasive force that she could not analyse. The man sitting on that grey rib of rock with the rising tide sucking at the seaweed a yard below him, had lost his right arm. It was the first thing she remembered having noticed about him, the loose sleeve tucked into the side pocket of his coat—that, and the extraordinary sadness of his eyes.

"Oh, well—"

She went down to the gate opening into the lane, left her hoe there, brushed her blue skirt, and passed her hands over her hair. The light was changing very rapidly; the water in the cove was a dead black, contrasting with the green cliff tops that were still lit by the sun. The lane dropped away, a mere rutty track, past a rough stone cottage that was used by fishermen for storing their gear, and ended in a rough quay built of boulders at the head of the cove. The girl made her way along the little strip of shingle and under the grey cliffs towards Mart Point.

Her eyes had an amused, wayward look. She picked her path casually among the rocks with an assumption of purposelessness that was self-deceptive. Twilight was very near, and the man perched on the ledge of rock still nearer. She could not help thinking of Victor Hugo's "Toilers of the Sea."

Her stout country shoes did not carry her silently over the rocks,

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and she made the most of the noise, having no desire to steal on him unawares. He was listening with an air of unobtrusive impatience. Presently he turned his head, saw that the invader was a girl, and promptly stared over the purpling sea.

She would have been annoyed with him but for that empty sleeve of his. Really, the man was an idiot to be sitting there; someone ought to have warned him.

"Excuse me, can you swim?"

He looked round at her with an air of great unwillingness.

"I beg your pardon?"

She flushed up.

"Of course, if you can swim and don't mind—"

Then she smothered her sarcasm, swept by a sudden sense of the man's loneliness. She had a feeling that he was a thing that a woman could not be cross with or treat as though he were the normal and stupid human ruled by common sense.

"They ought to have told you!"

"Who?"

"Why, anyone—the people where you are staying."

The change in her voice had a remarkable effect on him. He winced, half closed his eyes, and gripped hard at a bit of rock with his left hand.

"Thank you. Of course—you mean—the tides."

"Yes."

"And that dip in the reef behind there."

"Then they did tell you?"

He did not answer her question directly, but sat staring at the calm water that glided below him.

"I know all this coast. I spent one whole summer here."

"Perhaps you know it better than I do."

"That depends."

She sat down about two yards from him, and for the first time he looked at her with personal and live curiosity, yet with a shyness that was akin to fear. The after-glow still lay over Mart Point. Her tawny hair and brown throat and face, the soft steadiness of her large blue eyes, her air of strength and of courage and of patience were vivid things to be realised by a man whose eyes had been trained in the study of the earth beautiful.

"I don't think I remember seeing you."

"We have only been here a year."

"Since the war?"

"Yes."

"I was at Millercombe two years ago—spent the summer here."

"I see."

She glanced at the empty sleeve.

"Was it—the war?"

"This?"

"Yes."

"In France—a bomb wound. Of course, I'm out of it all now—out of everything."

His face had a hopeless look, and she saw him stare in a queer, attentive way at the dark water. The tide was rising, and the dusk was creeping down the valley to meet it.

She got up.

"We ought to be moving."

He scrambled up listlessly, and his eyes avoided hers.

"You live here, I suppose?"

"I have to live here. I mean, I make a living here."

"A living?"

She smiled, the smile of confident, brave health.

"Are you shocked?"

They were making their way back along the reef, climbing over small ravines, balancing themselves on sharp edges of stones. Their conversation was a little desultory and spasmodic.

"Why should I be shocked?"

"Well, your voice—"

"I want to know something."

"Yes?"

"Did you come down to tell me about the tides?"

"Of course."

He slipped, recovered himself, and followed her lead.

"I didn't see you."

"I was gardening, earthing up my potato crop."

"You farm?"

"Not exactly. I am running a carrier's business, and I sell vegetables and eggs. It's in the open air, and healthy."

They reached the shingle, and the man grew silent as though he were ill at ease. It was as if her serene vitality clashed with his fatalism; he was not bitter, only hopelessly and helplessly sad.

The lane was full of the dusk. The girl's home lay just over the rise of the first hill, a stone cottage

and garden standing above the lane, and screened from it by fuchsia hedges. A meadow and several out-houses belonged to the cottage, and a wood of young fir trees sheltered it from the sea.

She paused at the gate.

"Don't forget the tides."

"I'm not likely to. Good night."

He raised his hat, turned to go, but humoured a sudden impulse.

"You see, I don't know your name."

"Why should you?"

"Well—"

"It's Lorrimer—and Elizabeth Joyce Lorrimer, to be complete."

"Thank you."

He hesitated.

"My name's Flemming — Roger Flemming. I'm staying up in the village. Good night."

Flemming went on up the lane, and the girl climbed the steps into the garden, putting a trailing rose aside with her hand. Home meant a cottage furnished with the more precious things saved from a financial shipwreck, and a pale and rather petulant old lady who sat in an arm-chair all day and knitted mufflers and socks.

"Who was that, Joyce?"

"Who was what, mother?"

"The person you were talking to?"

Joyce had cultivated an attitude of unblushing frankness towards her mother, for there are certain people who can only be silenced by thrusting cold facts on them, and, like many old ladies, Mrs. Lorrimer was most supremely and piously selfish.

"That was a man, mother."

"My dear!"

"A man with only one arm. I met him down at the cove. His name is Roger Flemming. He is staying in the village. He has two legs, and wears a grey suit."

"Joyce—my dear!"

Joyce was more than a match for her mother, refusing to let the old lady's dead egotism dominate the cottage. She set about getting supper ready, and all the while she kept repeating the man's name to herself; it was strangely familiar, but she could not place it.

"Roger Flemming—Roger Flemming!"

She had seen it in print somewhere, and her eyes wandered to

the bookshelf in the corner. Huxley's Essays, somebody's "Handbook of Gardening," "Fruit Culture," a volume or two of Bernard Shaw's Plays, Young's "Night Thoughts," a Bible, the "Swiss Family Robinson," Wells's "Marriage." A book in green-and-gold offered itself with the title of "Wild Wessex." She took it down, opened it at the frontispiece, found herself looking at a blue study of Lulworth Cove with "Roger Flemming" scribbled in the right-hand lower corner.

She put the book back with a sudden grave and understanding softness in her eyes.

"Oh, what bad luck!"

She had glimpsed the tragedy of that lost right arm.

Through the dusk of the lane Roger Flemming went slowly towards Millercombe village. He was repeating her name to himself: "Joyce Lorrimer," as though the rhythm of it softened his intense sadness.

He had meant to drown himself that night down at Mart Point, and he wondered whether the girl had the faintest suspicion of what he had meant to do. She was so brown and comely, so full of the red blood of life, that her very vitality hurt him, made his pessimism more bitter and resigned. Life humiliated him. To-morrow or the next day he would be even with life.

Flemming woke early to the sound of the birds singing in the woods. The sun came over the hill and shone in at his window. He rose, dressed, let himself out of the cottage into the freshness of a spring morning. How beautiful it all was, with a beauty that wounded his heart. He had taught himself to love all this beauty, and the power of painting it had been taken from him.

He wandered about for a time in this green valley, and then turned down the lane towards the cove. He wanted to see her cottage by daylight; he never thought of seeing her.

But in this he was mistaken. The white doors of a little coachhouse were swung suddenly open, and a rough four-wheeled cart thrust its tailboard out into the sunlight. There was the click of the brake-handle over the notches, and then

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the girl appeared round the cart, sleeves rolled up, hair shining.

"Hallo! You are early!"

He stood and stared at her with a feeling of foolishness.

"The sun woke me up."

"What could be better? I'm going to market."

An idea struck her.

"Would you like a drive?"

"I?"

"If you don't mind being commercial! I am going into Mynton to catch the market. I have to load the cart."

"Perhaps I might help."

"Will you? And, I say, have you had any breakfast?"

He had to confess that he had not.

"I'm having mine in a minute. I'll hand you some out of the window."

Flemming breakfasted in the garden, sitting on a rustic seat under a tangle of creepers. He paid for it by helping to load the cart with baskets of cabbages, young lettuces, spinach, eggs and chickens. The brown pony was harnessed between the shafts. Joyce took her seat, and Flemming climbed up beside her.

The road wound up the valley through woods that were all blue with wild hyacinths. The grass and the hedges were a sparkle with dew. And down the V of the valley the sea showed blue and peaceful.

"Isn't it gorgeous?"

He looked at her clear profile.

"Almost too beautiful."

She did not speak for a moment.

"It was bad luck—that hand of yours. I have seen some of your work."

His sallow face flushed.

"How did you know?"

"Oh, I happened to."

They met a wagon at a sharp corner, and Joyce had to look to her pony. Then she turned and glanced at him with those clear blue eyes of hers.

"Have you tried yet?"

"What?"

"Don't think me an inquisitive beast. I mean—to use the other hand."

She saw his face cloud over.

"Yes."

"And wasn't it—?"

"It was ghastly—a farce. It takes years, you know, to get all that subtlety into one's fingers."

They were silent a while, Flemming looking out over the woods towards the sea, the girl staring straight ahead, because she knew that he did not want to be gawked at for a moment. They had reached the coast road along the hills, and the pony was jogging along at a steady trot.

"It does seem brutal."

"It's like having one's tongue cut out and not being able to speak. You see, I lived through my hand."

Quite suddenly she began to talk on other matters: the country, the lanes, the people of Devon and of how she liked them, the last book she had been reading, how the war was changing everything. Flemming sat and listened as much to her voice as to what she said. She had one of those pleasant, contralto voices that are peculiarly and subtly expressive. Her sense of fun was rich and quiet, and when she smiled her eyes seemed to overflow with light.

The pony was jogging down into Mynton almost before Flemming realised that they were near it.

"I shall be two or three hours down there at the market. If you care to wait."

"I'll wait—if I may."

"I have to pick up a lot of parcels for people. I get a penny a parcel. Not so bad!"

"If the people aren't snobs."

"What does it matter! Snobs don't make me feel sore. If people will be such fools—"

She dropped him outside the market, and he wandered up out of the town and on to the cliffs where limitless gorse was in bloom. He felt a different man from the suicidal creature who had sneaked down to Mart Point, obsessed by the idea that he must end himself in the sea. A man would not think of dying when he looked at Joyce Lorrimer's face.

He returned punctually to the market, and found her feeding the pony with cabbage leaves.

"Dissipation!" And she laughed. "It does us all good to be a little dissipated—sometimes."

They trundled through the town, gathering parcels at various shops, and Flemming quite enjoyed the business. It was a kind of new game, turning him from his moribidity.

When they were out on the hills he touched a sudden intimate note.

"Do you like this life?"

She smiled at him.

"I have to like it. I do like it."

"Why did you come here?"

"Once more—necessity. Father was a doctor; he died and left us—well, about a pound a week."

"A pound! I suppose I have about ten shillings, perhaps a little more. I was only a Tommy."

"One can do a lot with ten shillings."

"The possibilities are limited."

"Temporarily. You see, I had to make a fight for it. I wasn't going to be a governess or a nurse-maid, and I don't like factories, and I had mother."

He repeated the words dreamily.

"A fight for it. Yes—that's courage."

He stared into the distance, and she glanced intently at his face.

"Oh, I don't know. Life's good, very good, if one looks at it as a game. Haven't you saved any money?"

"Just a little—about fifty pounds. I was beginning to get going: two or three things in the Academy, and selling, when the war came."

She was silent. Then he said, almost roughly:

"Did you guess what I was going to do last night?"

"What?"

"End it all; drown myself."

She flicked the brown pony with the whip.

"Something made me go down to Mart Point."

"What a queer thing life is!"

"I think it can be very good."

There was a long silence as they crept cautiously down the long winding hill to Millercombe. Flemming was wondering what the girl's thoughts were, whether she despised him, thought him a decadent and a coward. He did not want her to think that. He wanted her goodwill, wanted it most severely.

"Do you know what it is to have a damnable pride?"

Her eyes hardened.

"I think so. I don't know that I have ever lost it. Need one lose it?"

"Perhaps not."

"We do things, all sorts of different things. Christ made tables and stools. Isn't this war teaching

the real people to be more honest, simpler? The old-time snob fools don't matter. I think I could laugh in the face of any rich and selfish old cad, laugh with joy and tell him how sorry I was for him."

"That's splendid."

There were the various parcels to be delivered, and the pennies to be collected. Joyce seemed to enjoy the game, and Flemming could not help noticing how great was the goodwill of the village towards her. She had gained and not lost by earning her own living.

He wanted to get away and think, reconstruct the puzzle of existence on the new lines that she had suggested.

"I shall go down to Mart Point this evening."

"Shall you?"

"Your time is terribly precious."

"To be honest, it is."

"Couldn't you give me half an hour?"

"Why not come and do some work. I have a lot of seed sowing to do. You might help."

"I'll do anything. What time?"

"After tea."

He went away and humbled himself before the picture of the girl whose delight in life was so sound and wholesome that the thing which mortals call misfortune had seemed a blessing and not a curse.

Joyce was in the garden when he walked down to her cottage after tea. He was introduced through the open window to Mrs. Lorrimer.

"Mother, this is Mr. Flemming, the artist; he lost his arm in France."

Mrs. Lorrimer was heard to say that war was horrible, inhuman.

"Mr. Flemming is going to help me in the garden."

Joyce carried him off, leaving her mother to meditate upon the dangerous wilfulness of youth.

There was a big patch of ground to be sown with beet seed. It had been dug, but needed working with a Canterbury hoe before the seed drills could be drawn. Joyce wasted no time.

"I'll break up the soil, and as soon as I have done a strip you can get the line, make a drill about an inch and a half deep, and sow the seed. Here's a packet."

"How thickly ought I to sow it?"

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"I put one seed about every inch. One can thin out afterwards."

"If I had the lid of a cardboard box—"

"You'll find one in the tool shed."

She started work, and Flemming had to stand and watch till she had prepared him a strip of soil.

"Didn't you get very tired at first?"

"Tired! I used to feel that my back was going to break in two. I was raw to it all."

"You seem fit enough now."

He looked at her with the critical and admiring eyes of the artist. Her brown, full-bosomed youth was triumphant.

"Do you know, you are doing me an immense amount of good."

"Am I?"

"You have shamed me into despising myself."

She straightened herself and looked at him.

"I'm not out to shame anybody. I'm not a moral example. I'm just fighting my way—and enjoying the game."

"I want your advice."

"Well?"

"What could I live on—down here?"

The work was neglected for the moment, since she threw herself into this new problem.

"That depends."

"On what I want?"

"Exactly. You have been a soldier; you ought to have learnt to be hard."

"I'm ready for bread and apples—and one room."

She smiled.

"Let's see. There is a little old cottage down there, with two rooms and a kitchen, to be let. You might get it for half a crown a week. That leaves about a shilling a day for food. You've ten shillings, I think you said."

"Yes."

"Sixpence over. Do you smoke?"

"I'm afraid so."

"What about clothes?"

"I have enough to go on with."

"Then there would be furniture."

"I've seen active service. A few boxes, some blankets, and pots and pans."

Her eyes glimmered approval.

"Could you do rough painting with that left hand—house painting, I mean?"

"Why not? I've got to educate this fist."

"You could get work in Mynton, I'm sure."

She watched his face intently, but it did not flinch.

"I'll go over to-morrow and try. I see it all now: I have got to hang on, make a fight, until I have taught this left hand of mine its cunning. I could work in spare hours, buy my materials with what I earn. I have some stuff stored in London."

"Splendid. Why, all that will come. You see, you've got your eyes and your soul—the real thing inside you. The hand will be taught to serve."

He stared at the ground.

"I think God sent you down there last night," he said, very solemnly.

They put in three hours' work at seed sowing, almost with the spirit of children playing together. The sun sunk low, the western sky was all gold; Mart Point, thrusting itself like a grey dagger into the sea, had lost its morbid significance. As they carried the tools back to the shed Roger Flemming opened his heart to her.

"I don't know how to thank you—yet. Words are poor things. I'll thank you—by playing the man."

Flemming walked into Mynton next morning, and after surveying possible opportunities, chose a decorator's shop. A bluff little man with grey hair and an aggressive beard answered the clang of the shop bell.

"Morning, sir."

"Good morning. Do you want a workman?"

"A what?"

"A workman."

The man stared, for Flemming's appearance and his question seemed out of harmony. But Flemming had caught a little of Joyce's spirit, and he went on cheerfully to explain.

"I'm an artist, and I lost my arm in France. I could do painting, and lettering. I suppose you are short of labour—"

"Short!" the little man snorted.

"I'm snowed under with work. It makes me want to swear when anybody rushes in with an order. The season's comin' on, and they all want their places smartenin' up."

He eyed Flemming critically.

"So you're an artist."

"Yes."

"What are you doin' this for?"

"Because I've got to do something—till I have trained my left hand to my old craft. Besides, work's work, isn't it?"

The little man expanded his chest.

"Now that's what I call sound sense. Supposin' we see what you can do, Mr.—"

"Flemming."

"Livin' here?"

"No; at Millercombe. I'm taking a cottage."

"My name's Green. Come this way."

He led Flemming into a work-room at the back of the shop, where an old fellow and a boy were making window frames. A new door leant against the wall. The floor was crisp with shavings, and the shelves round the room were full of tins of paint, varnish and rolls of paper.

Mr. Green pointed to the new door.

"That's got to be cream. Let's see what you can make of it. Here's your paint and brushes and turpentine."

Flemming took off his coat and started work, while Mr. Green got a ladder and looked out some wall papers. The old man and the boy betrayed unusual interest, the boy to the degree of developing giggles. Flemming worked on steadily, as though there was nothing in the whole world but that white wooden door.

Half an hour later Mr. Green strolled across and put his head on one side.

"Nothin' wrong with that. Suppose you wouldn't mind paintin' railin's on the outside of a house?"

"I'm ready for anything."

"You're the man for me."

Flemming walked down that evening to the Lorrimers' cottage, and found Joyce washing down the cart.

"I have started work."

"Where? At Mynton?"

"Yes; as a house painter, I'm to get sevenpence an hour, and I can put in as much time as I please."

She looked at him with a flash of brave enthusiasm.

"I'm glad. That's really splendid. And what about the cottage?"

"I am going to see that to-morrow."

Roger Flemming was a very busy and a particularly happy man during the next four months. He got up at five each morning and bathed in the cove, made his breakfast, painted for an hour, and then tramped off to Mynton. The Millercombe people accepted him as a familiar figure, passing by, wet or fine, with a haversack slung over his shoulder, dressed in his rough tweeds. Sometimes he was given a lift in Joyce's cart. He was back at his cottage soon after five, and found a meal ready, for an old woman came in for an hour each day. The rest of the daylight was given to painting. When dusk came he wandered across to the Lorrimers' or went to bed.

Yet Roger Flemming had to fight through many bitter hours. The educating of that left hand of his proved an exasperating though fascinating business. The old subtlety was slow in coming, and his genius was so far in advance of his fingers. Yet the power grew; he watched his own progress with secret exultation, for somehow his ultimate triumph seemed part of the light in Joyce's eyes.

She did not worry him with questions, but ever and again he brought her something that he had done. And he would watch her face with grave intentness, for that sun-warmed face of hers was life to him.

"Why, you must be just what you were, now."

"Not quite."

"Well, I think it's splendid."

He had conceived a sacred project that had included the buying of a little greenhouse and attaching it to the cottage for work in the winter. He would spend less time at Mynton, for he was managing to save money.

"I want you to let me make a study or two of you—may I?"

She laughed.

"If I am not to be kept idle for too long."

He spent several late summer evenings watching her at work in her garden and registering what he needed. Twice she sat for him for half an hour at a time. He knew her face so well, loved her and every line of her with such secret strength that he was a man inspired.

Courage

That picture was his life during the winter months. He worked at it lovingly and with a kind of awe, for never in the old days had he painted as he was painting now. He called the picture "Courage." It showed Joyce resting for a moment in her garden, the sunset on her face, behind her the autumn-browned herbage, the pinewood and the blue of the sea. There was a kind of exultant weariness in her blue eyes. She was a glowing, achieving figure, full of youth, valour and soft strength, her hoe in her hands, her arms all brown to the elbow.

Flemming never showed it to her, any more than he openly betrayed his love. He wanted to win through to prove himself before he dared to think of that. He had a great fear, too, that she was a good comrade and no more, for he had come by a new humility and a finer manliness.

So the young year bourgeoned. The picture went on its great adventure. Flemming ran wild when that letter came telling him that "Courage" would be hung.

Joyce saw him coming through the garden with a strange, radiant face.

"They have taken it—my picture."

"What picture?"

"I worked at it in the winter. I did not want you to know. It's to be hung."

"The Academy?"

"Yes."

"Roger, I'm so glad."

Her eyes and her flushed face made her seem the most wonderful thing in the whole world.

"What is it?"

"I want you to see it—in London. Couldn't you take a little holiday?"

"I might. I have a frump of an aunt in town."

"You don't know how proud I should be."

"I might spare three days," she said.

Some time later she spared those three days, though she refused to let Flemming buy her railway ticket. There was a little crowd about Flemming's picture, which was hung on the line. He held back and let Joyce go forward alone.

He was standing by himself when she drew out of the crowd and glanced round for him. There was a strangely solemn look in her eyes. Flemming went to meet her.

"You are not angry with me?"

"Angry? How could I be? But I am not like that, am I?"

"Why not? Isn't it true?"

"I mean, I'm not— The girl in the picture is beautiful."

He smiled at her with great tenderness.

"It's as I saw you. I can't help it—if you happen to be like that."

Her eyes met his and filled with a sudden mystery of light.

"You are going to be a great man, Roger."

"Thanks to that girl in the picture. It is your work, Joyce. Oh, confound these people!"

She smiled and said softly:

"Let's go out into the Park. I can't believe that I am like that."

"May I try to tell you why my eyes—and my hand—could not lie?"

"Oh, perhaps! And all those months you kept it secret?"

"Because it was a part of something else," he said. "I wanted to win through—before—before I dared to say anything."

She let him see the truth in her eyes.

"Perhaps I am very proud of you, dear."

"Whatever I am—God knows—you made me," he answered, "and there's nothing in the world like you, Joyce."

"I'm just a woman," she said; "isn't that enough?"

WARWICK DEERING.



STARS AND FIRE-FLIES

He who made the stars
Made fire-flies too;
The stars were not enough!
He knew
There must be fire-flies, too.

And so He made great deeds
For us to do;
But, "These are not enough,"
He knew—
He made the small tasks, too.

WARWICK DEEPING

Tells the story of a girl's

COURAGE

*And how it raised a
man from the
Valley of
Despair*

THE girl with the tawny hair straightened her tired back and leant for a moment on the handle of her hoe. She was earthing-up potatoes in her garden on the side of the hill, where the brown and green lines ran up to meet the far-flung crimson of the westering sun. Her eyes sought the sea, and from the sea they passed to the cove lying almost at her feet, with its grey half-circle of rocks capped by the brilliant green of grass and young bracken. The tide was rising sleepily in the cove, and flowing in to meet the green torrent of spring foliage that poured down the Millercombe Valley, smothering the cottages and flooding the steep sides of the hills.

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She did not utter the words, though they sounded for her in the silence of her own thoughts. Nor had the man down yonder

inspired her with anything more than a mere casual curiosity until he had worried her a little by making her feel most strangely and unreasonably responsible. So far as she knew, he had never seen her, though she had seen him in his comings and goings to and from the rocks of Mart Point. Perhaps she was superstitious, or peculiarly sensitive, but the shadow thrown by the hill stretched out a great arm across the still waters of the cove.

She turned and went on with her work, but the movements of her hoe grew slower and less purposeful, and presently she stood motionless, staring at the ground.

"How absurd!"

She was being impelled down yonder by some strange persuasive force that she could not analyse. The man sitting on that grey rib of rock with the rising tide sucking at the seaweed a yard below him, had lost his right arm. It was the first thing she remembered having noticed about him, the loose sleeve tucked into the side-pocket of his coat—that, and the extraordinary sadness of his eyes.

"Oh, well——"

She went down to the gate opening into the lane, left her hoe there, brushed her

Courage

blue skirt, and passed her hands over her hair. The light was changing very rapidly; the water in the cove was a dead black, contrasting with the green cliff-tops that were still lit by the sun. The lane dropped away, a mere rutty track, past a rough stone cottage that was used by fishermen for storing their gear, and ended in a rough quay built of boulders at the head of the cove. The girl made her way along the little strip of shingle and under the grey cliffs towards Mart Point.

HER eyes had an amused, wayward look. She picked her path casually among the rocks with an assumption of purposelessness that was self-deceptive. Twilight was very near, and the man perched on the ledge of rock still nearer. She could not help thinking of Victor Hugo's "Toilers of the Sea."

Her stout country shoes did not carry her silently over the rocks, and she made the most of the noise, having no desire to steal on him unawares. He was listening with an air of unobtrusive impatience. Presently he turned his head, saw that the invader was a girl, and promptly stared over the purpling sea.

She would have been annoyed with him but for that empty sleeve of his. Really, the man was an idiot to be sitting there; someone ought to have warned him.

"Excuse me, can you swim?"

He looked round at her with an air of great unwillingness.

"I beg your pardon?"

She flushed up.

"Of course, if you can swim and don't mind——"

Then she smothered her sarcasm, swept by a sudden sense of the man's loneliness. She had a feeling that he was a thing that a woman could not be cross with or treat as though he were the normal and stupid human ruled by common sense.

"They ought to have told you!"

"Who?"

"Why, anyone—the people where you are staying."

The change in her voice had a remarkable effect on him. He winced, half-closed his eyes, and gripped hard at a bit of rock with his left hand.

"Thank you. Of course—you mean—the tides."

"Yes."

"And that dip in the reef behind there."

"Then they did tell you?"

He did not answer her question directly, but sat staring at the calm water that glided below him.

"I know all this coast. I spent one whole summer here."

"Perhaps you know it better than I do."

"That depends."

She sat down about two yards from him, and for the first time he looked at her with personal and live curiosity, yet with a shyness that was akin to fear. The after-glow still lay over Mart Point. Her tawny hair and brown throat and face, the soft steadiness of her large blue eyes, her air of strength and of courage and of patience were vivid things to be realized by a man whose eyes had been trained in the study of the earth.

"I don't think I remember seeing you."

"We have only been here a year."

"Since the war?"

"Yes."

"I was at Millercombe two years ago—spent the summer here."

"I see."

She glanced at the empty sleeve.

"Was it—the war?"

"This?"

"Yes."

"In France—a bomb wound."

His face had a hopeless look, and she saw him stare in a queer, attentive way at the dark water. The tide was rising, and the dusk was creeping down the valley to meet it. She got up.

"We ought to be moving."

He scrambled up listlessly, and his eyes avoided hers.

"You live here, I suppose?"

"I have to live here. I mean, I make a living here."

"A living?"

She smiled, the smile of confident, brave health.

"Are you shocked?"

They were making their way back along the reef, climbing over small ravines, balancing themselves on sharp edges of stones. Their conversation was a little desultory and spasmodic.

"Why should I be shocked?"

"Well, your voice——"

"I want to know something."

"Yes?"

"Did you come down to tell me about the tides?"

"Of course."

He slipped, recovered himself, and followed her lead.

"I didn't see you."

"I was gardening, earthing-up my potato crop."

"You farm?"

"Not exactly. I am running a carrier's business, and I sell vegetables and eggs. It's in the open air, and healthy."

They reached the shingle, and the man grew silent as though he were ill at ease. It was as if her serene vitality clashed with his fatalism; he was not bitter, only hopelessly and helplessly sad.

The lane was full of the dusk. The girl's home lay just over the rise of the first hill, a stone cottage and garden standing above the lane, and screened from it by fuchsia hedges. A meadow and several outhouses belonged to the cottage, and a wood of young fir-trees sheltered it from the sea.

She paused at the gate.

"Don't forget the tides."

"I'm not likely to. Good night."

He raised his hat, turned to go, but humoured a sudden impulse.

"You see, I don't know your name."

"Why should you?"

"Well——"

"It's Lorrimer—and Elizabeth Joyce Lorrimer, to be complete."

"Thank you."

He hesitated.

"My name's Flemming—Roger Flemming. I'm staying up in the village. Good night."

Flemming went on up the lane, and the girl climbed the steps into the garden, putting a trailing rose aside with her hand. Home meant a cottage furnished with the more precious things saved from a financial shipwreck, and a pale and rather petulant old lady who sat in an armchair all day and knitted mufflers and socks.

"Who was that, Joyce?"

"Who was what, mother?"

"The person you were talking to?"

Joyce had cultivated an attitude of unblushing frankness towards her mother, for there are certain people who can only be silenced by thrusting cold facts on them, and, like many old ladies, Mrs. Lorrimer was most supremely and piously selfish.

"That was a man, mother."

"My dear!"

"A man with only one arm. I met him down at the cove. His name is Roger

Flemming. He is staying in the village. He has two legs, and wears a grey suit."

"Joyce—my dear!"

Joyce was more than a match for her mother, refusing to let the old lady's dead egotism dominate the cottage. She set about getting supper ready, and all the while she kept repeating the man's name to herself; it was strangely familiar, but she could not place it.

"Roger Flemming—Roger Flemming!"

She had seen it in print somewhere, and her eyes wandered to the bookshelf in the corner. Huxley's *Essays*, somebody's *"Handbook of Gardening"*, *"Fruit Culture"*, a volume or two of Bernard Shaw's *Plays*, Young's *"Night Thoughts"*, a Bible, the *"Swiss Family Robinson"*, Wells's *"Marriage"*. A book in green and gold offered itself with the title of *"Wild Wessex"*. She took it down, opened it at the frontispiece, found herself looking at a blue study of Lulworth Cove with "Roger Flemming" scribbled in the right-hand lower corner.

She put the book back with a sudden grave and understanding softness in her eyes.

"Oh, what bad luck!"

She had glimpsed the tragedy of that lost right arm.

THROUGH the dusk of the lane Roger Flemming went slowly towards Millercombe village. He was repeating her name to himself: "Joyce Lorrimer," as though the rhythm of it softened his intense sadness.

He had meant to drown himself that night down at Mart Point, and he wondered whether the girl had the frailest suspicion of what he had meant to do. She was so brown and comely, so full of the red blood of life, that her very vitality hurt him, made his pessimism more bitter and resigned. Life humiliated him. To-morrow or the next day he would be even with life.

Flemming woke early to the sound of the birds singing in the woods. The sun came over the hill and shone in at his window. He rose, dressed, let himself out of the cottage into the freshness of a spring morning. How beautiful it all was, with a beauty that wounded his heart. He had taught himself to love all this beauty, and the power of painting it had been taken from him.

He wandered about for a time in this

Courage

green valley, and then turned down the lane towards the cove. He wanted to see her cottage by daylight; he never thought of seeing her.

But in this he was mistaken. The white doors of a little coachhouse were swung suddenly open, and a rough four-wheeled cart thrust its tailboard out into the sunlight. There was the click of the brake-handle over the notches, and then the girl appeared round the cart, sleeves rolled up, hair shining.

"Hallo! You are early!"

He stood and stared at her with a feeling of foolishness.

"The sun woke me up."

"What could be better? I'm going to market."

An idea struck her.

"Would you like a drive?"

"I?"

"If you don't mind being commercial! I am going into Mynton to catch the market. I have to load the cart."

"Perhaps I might help."

"Will you? And, I say, have you had any breakfast?"

He had to confess that he had not.

"I'm having mine in a minute. I'll hand you some out of the window."

FLEMMING breakfasted in the garden, sitting on a rustic seat under a tangle of creepers. He paid for it by helping to load the cart with baskets of cabbages, young lettuces, spinach, eggs and chickens. The brown pony was harnessed between the shafts. Joyce took her seat, and Flemming climbed up beside her.

The road wound up the valley through woods that were all blue with wild hyacinths. The grass and the hedges were a-sparkle with dew. And down the V of the valley the sea showed blue and peaceful.

"Isn't it gorgeous?"

He looked at her clear profile.

"Almost too beautiful."

She did not speak for a moment.

"It was bad luck—that hand of yours. I have seen some of your work."

His sallow face flushed.

"How did you know?"

"Oh, I happened to."

They met a wagon at a sharp corner, and Joyce had to look to her pony. Then she turned and glanced at him with those clear blue eyes of hers.

"Have you tried yet?"

"What?"

"Don't think me an inquisitive beast. I mean—to use the other hand."

She saw his face cloud over.

"Yes."

"And wasn't it——?"

"It was ghastly—a farce. It takes years, you know, to get all that subtlety into one's fingers."

They were silent a while, Flemming looking out over the woods towards the sea, the girl staring straight ahead, because she knew that he did not want to be gawked at for a moment. They had reached the coast road along the hills, and the pony was jogging along at a steady trot.

"It does seem brutal."

"It's like having one's tongue cut out and not being able to speak. You see, I lived through my hand."

Quite suddenly she began to talk on other matters: the country, the lanes, the people of Devon and of how she liked them, the last book she had been reading, how the war had changed everything. Flemming sat and listened as much to her voice as to what she said. She had one of those pleasant, contralto voices that are peculiarly and subtly expressive. Her sense of fun was rich and quiet, and when she smiled her eyes seemed to overflow with light.

The pony was jogging down into Mynton almost before Flemming realised that they were near it.

"I shall be two or three hours down there at the market. If you care to wait."

"I'll wait—if I may."

"I have to pick up a lot of parcels for people. I get a penny a parcel. Not so bad!"

"If the people aren't snobs."

"What does it matter? Snobs don't make me feel sore. If people will be such fools——"

She dropped him outside the market, and he wandered up out of the town and on to the cliffs where limitless gorse was in bloom. He felt a different man from the suicidal creature who had sneaked down to Mart Point, obsessed by the idea that he must end himself in the sea. A man would not think of dying when he looked at Joyce Lorrimer's face.

He returned punctually to the market, and found her feeding the pony with cabbage leaves.

"Dissipation!" And she laughed. "It

does us all good to be a little dissipated—sometimes."

They trundled through the town, gathering parcels at various shops, and Flemming quite enjoyed the business. It was a kind of new game, turning him from his morbidity.

When they were out on the hills he touched a sudden intimate note.

"Do you like this life?"

She smiled at him.

"I have to like it. I do like it."

"Why did you come here?"

"Once more—necessity. Father was a doctor; he died and left us—well, about a pound a week."

"A pound! I suppose I have about ten shillings, perhaps a little more."

"One can do a lot with ten shillings."

"The possibilities are limited."

"Temporarily. You see, I had to make a fight for it. I wasn't going to be a governess or a nursemaid, and I don't like factories, and I had mother."

He repeated the words dreamily.

"A fight for it. Yes—that's courage."

He stared into the distance, and she glanced intently at his face.

"Oh, I don't know. Life's good, very good, if one looks at it as a game. Haven't you saved any money?"

"Just a little—about fifty pounds. I was beginning to get going: two or three things in the Academy, and selling, when the war came."

She was silent. Then he said, almost roughly:

"Did you guess what I was going to do last night?"

"What?"

"End it all; drown myself."

She flicked the brown pony with the whip.

"Something made me go down to Mart Point."

"What a queer thing life is!"

"I think it can be very good."

There was a long silence as they crept cautiously down the long winding hill to Millercombe. Flemming was wondering what the girl's thoughts were, whether she despised him, thought him a decadent and a coward. He did not want her to think that. He wanted her good will, wanted it most severely.

"Do you know what it is to have a damnable pride?"

Her eyes hardened.

"I think so. I don't know that I have ever lost it. Need one lose it?"

"Perhaps not."

"We do things, all sorts of different things. Christ made tables and stools. The old-time snob fools don't matter. I think I could laugh in the face of any rich and selfish old cad, laugh with joy and tell him how sorry I was for him."

"That's splendid."

THERE were the various parcels to be delivered, and the pennies to be collected. Joyce seemed to enjoy the game, and Flemming could not help noticing how great was the good will of the village towards her. She had gained and not lost by earning her own living.

He wanted to get away and think, reconstruct the puzzle of existence on the new lines that she had suggested.

"I shall go down to Mart Point this evening."

"Shall you?"

"Your time is terribly precious."

"To be honest, it is."

"Couldn't you give me half-an-hour?"

"Why not come and do some work. I have a lot of seed-sowing to do. You might help."

"I'll do anything. What time?"

"After tea."

He went away and humbled himself before the picture of the girl whose delight in life was so sound and wholesome that the thing which mortals call misfortune had seemed a blessing and not a curse.

Joyce was in the garden when he walked down to her cottage after tea. He was introduced through the open window to Mrs. Lorrimer.

"Mother, this is Mr. Flemming, the artist; he lost his arm in the Great War."

Mrs. Lorrimer was heard to say that war was horrible, inhuman.

"Mr. Flemming is going to help me in the garden."

Joyce carried him off, leaving her mother to meditate upon the dangerous wilfulness of youth.

There was a big patch of ground to be sown with beet seed. It had been dug, but needed working with a Canterbury hoe before the seed drills could be drawn. Joyce wasted no time.

"I'll break up the soil, and as soon as I have done a strip you can get the line,

• Courage

make a drill about an inch-and-a-half deep, and sow the seed. Here's a packet."

"How thickly ought I to sow it?"

"I put one seed about every inch. One can thin out afterwards."

"If I had the lid of a cardboard box——"

"You'll find one in the tool-shed."

She started work, and Flemming had to stand and watch till she had prepared him a strip of soil.

"Didn't you get very tired at first?"

"Tired! I used to feel that my back was going to break in two. I was raw to it all."

"You seem fit enough now."

He looked at her with the critical and admiring eyes of the artist. Her brown, full-bosomed youth was triumphant.

"Do you know, you are doing me an immense amount of good?"

"Am I?"

"You have shamed me into despising myself."

She straightened herself and looked at him.

"I'm not out to shame anybody. I'm not a moral example. I'm just fighting my way—and enjoying the game."

"I want your advice."

"Well?"

"What could I live on—down here?"

The work was neglected for the moment, since she threw herself into this new problem.

"That depends."

"On what I want?"

"Exactly. You have been a soldier; you ought to have learnt to be hard."

"I'm ready for bread and apples—and one room."

She smiled.

"Let's see. There is a little old cottage down there, with two rooms and a kitchen, to be let. You might get it for half-a-crown a week. That leaves about a shilling a day for food. You've ten shillings, I think you said."

"Yes."

"Sixpence over. Do you smoke?"

"I'm afraid so."

"What about clothes?"

"I have enough to go on with."

"Then there would be furniture."

"A few boxes, some blankets, and pots and pans would do."

Her eyes glimmered approval.

"Could you do rough painting with that left hand—house-painting, I mean?"

"Why not? I've got to educate this fist."

"You could get work in Mynton, I'm sure."

She watched his face intently, but it did not flinch.

"I'll go over to-morrow and try. I see it all now: I have got to hang on, make a fight, until I have taught this left hand of mine its cunning. I could work in my spare hours, buy my materials with what I earn. I have some stuff stored in London."

"Splendid. Why, all that will come. You see, you've got your eyes and your soul—the real thing inside you. The hand will be taught to serve."

He stared at the ground.

"I think God sent you down there last night," he said, very solemnly.

THEY put in three hours' work at seed-sowing, almost with the spirit of children playing together. The sun sunk low, the western sky was all gold; Mart Point, thrusting itself like a grey dagger into the sea, had lost its morbid significance. As they carried the tools back to the shed, Roger Flemming opened his heart to her.

"I don't know how to thank you—yet. Words are poor things. I'll thank you—by playing the man."

Flemming walked into Mynton next morning, and after surveying possible opportunities, chose a decorator's shop. A bluff little man with grey hair and an aggressive beard answered the clang of the shop bell.

"Morning, sir."

"Good morning. Do you want a workman?"

"A what?"

"A workman."

The man stared, for Flemming's appearance and his question seemed out of harmony. But Flemming had caught a little of Joyce's spirit, and he went on cheerfully to explain.

"I'm an artist, and I lost my arm in France. I could do painting, and lettering, I suppose you are short of labour——"

"Short!" the little man snorted. "I'm snowed under with work. It makes me want to swear when anybody rushes in with an order. The season's comin' on, and they all want their places smartenin' up."

He eyed Flemming critically.

"So you're an artist."

Yes."

"What are you doin' this for?"

"Because I've got to do something—till I have trained my left hand to my old craft. Besides, work's work, isn't it?"

The little man expanded his chest.

"Now that's what I call sound sense.

Supposin' we see what you can do, Mr.—"

"Flemming."

"Livin' here?"

"No; at Millercombe. I'm taking a cottage."

"My name's Green. Come this way."

He led Flemming into a workroom at the back of the shop, where an old fellow and a boy were making window-frames. A new door leant against the wall. The floor was crisp with shavings, and the shelves round the room were full of tins of paint, varnish and rolls of paper.

Mr. Green pointed to the new door.

"That's got to be cream. Let's see what you can make of it. Here's your paint and brushes and turpentine."

Flemming took off his coat and started work, while Mr. Green got a ladder and looked out some wallpapers. The old man and the boy betrayed unusual interest, the boy to the degree of developing giggles. Flemming worked on steadily, as though there was nothing in the whole world but that white wooden door.

Half-an-hour later, Mr. Green strolled across and put his head on one side.

"Nothin' wrong with that. Suppose you wouldn't mind paintin' railin's on the outside of a house?"

"I'm ready for anything."

"You're the man for me."

Flemming walked down that evening to the Lorrimers' cottage, and found Joyce washing down the cart.

"I have started work."

"Where? At Mynton?"

"Yes; as a house-painter. I'm to get sevenpence an hour, and I can put in as much time as I please."

She looked at him with a flash of brave enthusiasm.

"I'm glad. That's really splendid. And what about the cottage?"

"I am going to see that to-morrow."

Roger Flemming was a very busy and a particularly happy man during the next four months. He got up at five each morning and bathed in the cove, made his breakfast, painted for an hour, and then tramped off to Mynton. The Millercombe people

Big Ben

by

HILDA HART

UP in his lofty tower Big Ben

Broods, like a Titan, above men,

And marks with booming, punctual chime
Each passing quarter-hour of time.

Through the wide-branched catalpa-trees
Far, far below the Yard he sees,

Where men come hurrying through the
gate,

Intent upon affairs of State.

While Ministries are formed or fall,

He unperturbed repeats his call—

"Lo! Time is passing, little men!"

Thus, every quarter, booms Big Ben.

accepted him as a familiar figure, passing by, wet or fine, with a haversack slung over his shoulder, dressed in his rough tweeds. Sometimes he was given a lift in Joyce's cart. He was back at his cottage soon after five, and found a meal ready, for an old woman came in for an hour each day. The rest of the daylight was given to painting. When dusk came he wandered across to the Lorrimers or went to bed.

Yet Roger Flemming had to fight through many bitter hours. The educating of that left hand of his proved an exasperating though fascinating business. The old subtlety was slow in coming, and his genius was so far in advance of his fingers. Yet the power grew; he watched his own progress with secret exultation, for somehow his ultimate triumph seemed part of the light in Joyce's eyes.

She did not worry him with questions, but ever and again he brought her something that he had done. And he would watch her face with grave intentness, for that sun-warmed face of hers was life to him.

"Why, you must be just what you were, now."

"Not quite."

Courage

"Well, I think it's splendid!"

He had conceived a sacred project that had included the buying of a little greenhouse and attaching it to the cottage for work in the winter. He would spend less time at Mynton, for he was managing to save money.

"I want you to let me make a study or two of you—may I?"

She laughed.

"If I am not to be kept idle for too long."

He spent several late summer evenings watching her at work in her garden and registering what he needed. Twice she sat for him for half-an-hour at a time. He knew her face so well, loved her and every line of her with such secret strength that he was a man inspired.

That picture was his life during the winter months. He worked at it lovingly and with a kind of awe, for never in the old days had he painted as he was painting now. He called the picture "Courage." It showed Joyce resting for a moment in her garden, the sunset on her face, behind her the autumn-browned herbage, the pine-wood and the blue of the sea. There was a kind of exultant weariness in her blue eyes. She was a glowing, achieving figure, full of youth, valour and soft strength, hoe in hands, her arms all brown to the elbow.

Flemming never showed it to her, any more than he openly betrayed his love. He wanted to win through, to prove himself before he dared to think of that. He had a great fear, too, that she was a good comrade and no more, for he had come by a new humility and a finer manliness.

So the young year bourgeoned. The picture went on its great adventure. Flemming ran wild when that letter came telling him that "Courage" would be hung.

Joyce saw him coming through the garden with a strange, radiant face.

"They have taken it—my picture!"

"What picture?"

"I worked at it in the winter. I did not want you to know. It's to be hung."

"The Academy?"

"Yes."

"Roger, I'm so glad."

Her eyes and her flushed face made her

seem the most wonderful thing in the whole world.

"What is it?"

"I want you to see it—in London. Couldn't you take a little holiday?"

"I might. I have a frump of an aunt in Town."

"You don't know how proud I should be."

"I might spare three days," she said.

Some time later she spared those three days, though she refused to let Flemming buy her railway ticket. There was a little crowd about Flemming's picture, which was hung on the line. He held back and let Joyce go forward alone.

He was standing by himself when she drew out of the crowd and glanced round for him. There was a strangely solemn look in her eyes.

Flemming went to meet her.

"You are not angry with me?"

"Angry? How could I be? But I am not like that, am I?"

"Why not? Isn't it true?"

"I mean, I'm not— The girl in the picture is beautiful."

He smiled at her with great tenderness.

"It's as I saw you. I can't help it—if you happen to be like that."

Her eyes met his and filled with a sudden mystery of light.

"You are going to be a great man, Roger."

"Thanks to that girl in the picture. It is your work, Joyce. Oh, confound these people!"

She smiled and said softly:

"Let's go out into the Park. I can't believe that I am like that."

"May I try to tell you why my eyes—and my hand—could not lie?"

"Oh, perhaps! And all those months you kept it secret."

"Because it was a part of something else," he said. "I wanted to win through—before—before I dared to say anything."

She let him see the truth in her eyes.

"Perhaps I am very proud of you, dear."

"Whatever I am—God knows—you made me," he answered, "and there's nothing in the world like you, Joyce."

"I'm just a woman," she said; "isn't that enough?"



FEB 1924
THE STORYTELLER

The Black Spider

By Warwick Deeping

"As he stood for the moment at the door he seemed to see some black thing writhing and twisting in the far corner of the great room."



IN DINANT, with the autumn wind blowing from the south-west over the Breton moors, Avis Clare wrote this letter to her husband:

"MY DARLING,—
How shall I begin this letter to you, and how shall I end it? It is because I love you so much that I have the courage to tell you all that is in my heart.

"My little holiday is at an end. Ida is packing while I write, and I sit at my window and look out over a landscape that cries out to me: 'Autumn is here.'

"You sent me away because you thought that I was not well. I was not well, dear, because I was lonely and because my heart had begun to be afraid. I must tell you the truth, for you are the most truthful of men; but sometimes clever men are a little blind.

"In two days I shall come back to you, but this letter goes to-night, and I want you to read it before you see me in the flesh.

"Oh, my dear, it is not to reproach you that I confess that my life was growing very lonely.

"Did you ever suspect? No, I know that you did not, or this letter would never have been written.

"But your work! How proud I am of it—even though it was hurting my heart. It absorbed you, it exhausted you, it drew you away from me and shut the doors against

my love. It began by being our child—but it was becoming my tragedy. Do you remember how I used to come into the laboratory and sit on a stool and make you coffee, and how we chattered like children? Your work was a child then; it laughed and held out its hands to me, but in a little while it grew up into a grim, lean thing that was jealous. It frowned at me when I came. It got between us, and made you silent and pre-occupied. It put a hand on my bosom and tried to push me away. And last summer I ceased to come to you in that big room. Did you notice it? Oh—my dear—how lonely I was!

"I began to be afraid of this thing—this work, this demon. It seemed to threaten me—'Fool woman, keep your soft hands out of my man's life. Ambition is hard—it is merciless. The soul of this man is mine, not yours.'

"I love you, dear, and I was frightened. This thing had become so big; there seemed no room for me beside it. That was why I came away.

"And now I am coming back to you. I know that you love me, and I ask you—do not let this Work Beast crush me out of your life.

"Do you know that the heart of a woman yearns to help? It was my ambition to build a sort of magic wall around you, so that the little petty things of life should never disturb you. It was I who gave you the thinker's tranquillity. It is the boast of my love and not the cry of my vanity.

The Black Spider

"I have written this letter, and how shall I end it save as a woman? I love you.—Avis."

The English Channel lay between them, and as she wrote Avis Clare had a vision of a bright-eyed, brownish man rather like a restless yet indefatigable brown dog, bending over the bench in his laboratory on the Surrey hills.

Her vision painted a reality. The house was there, white walled, heather thatched against a wood of pines. The pavilion was there in which Jordan Clare had his laboratory, a little classic building with big neo-Georgian windows overlooking the heath country and the hills, set more than a stone's throw from the house, and sheltered by old Scotch firs. The man was there in his old shabby Norfolk jacket frayed at the cuffs and stained by chemicals. He stood by one of the big windows, holding a test tube over the flame of a Bunsen burner, his face intent and serene. He did not look at the landscape, or the gold of the autumn woods, or the vast, rusty sweeps of heather. He was absorbed, forgetful of everything. The Scotch firs swayed and sighed, and he did not hear them. The sunset blazed out and he did not see it. He heard nothing but the "click-click" of the boiling liquid in the tube, and saw nothing but the pinkish froth that foamed behind the glass.

Somebody knocked at the door.

"Six o'clock, sir. You haven't touched your tea."

"I'm busy," said the man at the bench.

He went on with his work, while the dusk filled the big white room with all its polished, scientific gear, its glass cases, its books, its rows and rows of bottles. It became grey, and in one corner some conglomeration of wires, rods and piping grew to the likeness of a spider's web. Avis had seen it thus, and hanging in the web she had imagined a black spider—this man's

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The yellow afterglow seemed to suggest a complex of thought to Jordan Clare.

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He heard a voice saying:

"Avis crosses to-morrow."

The voice made him angry. For a year the Black Spider had spun a web about him, and the cold grey threads had made a sheath about his soul. The emotional part of him was dying, but that night it made a little piteous struggling and its struggles vexed the man of formulæ—this exact, precise creature, who was growing hard like the glass of a retort. Pshaw! This silly sentimentality! Nothing had ever happened to Avis. He did not

By Warwick Deeping

want anything to happen that might distract him from his work.

When the dawn came there was a litter of leaves everywhere, and broken pine branches in the wood. The wind had died away, and the face of the sky was a pure, wistful blue. The earth shivered a little with the chill of an autumn morning, and the leaves on the grass looked like flakes of gold.

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"Idiots!" said Clare to himself; "botchers. I'll go out."

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"I'll get a dog," he thought. "Avis would like a dog."

When he returned he found her letter waiting for him, and he sat in the garden and read it. At first he was shocked, astonished, even a little angry, but the cry of her love went to his heart. The soul in him struggled and broke the web.

"My God!" he said. "My God!"

He got up, trembling, and went into the house. He looked at her favourite chair, at the great vases that were always full of flowers. They were empty now, and their emptiness seemed symbolical. He then opened the flap of the little mahogany bureau by the window. Her pen lay there, her scented blot-

ting book, her ivory paper-knife, and a bundle of letters. A shock of pain went through him. He passed out and up the stairs to the bedroom. A cerise-coloured dressing jacket hung behind the door, and suddenly he buried his face in it with a choking at the throat.

"My God—what a selfish beast I have been!"

He opened the cupboard and the wardrobe and looked at her dresses, her shoes. His reawakened tenderness trembled like a flame in a wind. The sweet perfume and the exquisite soul of her seemed everywhere.

And then his heart cried out:

"To-morrow—to-morrow she will be here!"

He passed another restless night, but his restlessness was alive, not dead, crying out like a new-born child in the silences of the night. He was shaken with tenderness, and the soul of him felt naked, exultant, ashamed. What had he been doing all these months—thrusting her away from him and burying himself in his laboratory? What could all his science give him that was more wonderful than the love of this woman? It was a miracle, a mystery, and all his test-tubes and his furnaces would never give him anything so divine as this.

Clare was awake at dawn, and standing at the window he watched the grey world strip its shroud. The valley was full of white mist, and from the trees a slow patter of moisture fell. Everything was very still, and in spite of the beauty of this autumn dawn, Jordan Clare was conscious of a little tremor of strangeness, of fear. Death! The fall of the leaf, a little greyiness, a little sunlight, and then—night! How short life was! It seemed only yesterday that he was a boy, and now he had an almost frightened desire to hold life back, to embrace it passionately, to cry, "Stay with me; stay!"

The sun rose, and the valley smoked like a funeral pyre. Clare dressed himself, after a cold bath—

The Black Spider

and he dressed himself with the naïf care of a boy who is in love. That dirty old Norfolk jacket hanging on the end of the bed was pitched into a cupboard. He was very careful with his tie, and he wore a suit that he had not worn for months.

At breakfast, as he poured out his tea, he said to himself: "Her hands will do it to-morrow."

He smiled.

"I want to kiss those hands."

He ate very little, for his hunger was not of the flesh. The laboratory was locked, and he did not touch the key, and when he went into the sunny spaces of the garden, he felt a curious and sudden horror of that white building—that scientific box without a soul! He lit a pipe and went and stood by the gate, thinking that she might send a telegram to tell him the time of her train.

The road curved below, sweeping up the side of the hill, and on it Jordan Clare saw something that moved. It was the paper boy cycling up from the village with the morning papers, and Clare watched him as he might have watched a beetle crawling up a wall. He did not attach much importance to the figure on the bicycle. It was a piece of mechanism; hardly that.

The boy dismounted at the gate. He was sandy haired and freckled, with pale, unpleasant eyes. His collar was dirty and his boots had not been cleaned. He wheeled his bicycle to the gate and handed Clare the paper.

"Good morning," said the man.

"Morning," echoed the boy, and mounting, rode off.

Jordan Clare opened the paper.

"Disaster in the Channel. Southampton boat lost with all hands."

He did not realize it at first. The thing seemed too absurd, too tragic, too overwhelming. He stood there, still puffing at his pipe, holding the paper spread upon the top of the gate, reading it as though the news meant nothing. Then a voice of dismay seemed to cry out in the distance, but it was like a voice from

some spirit world that was strange to him. He read on, standing very still in the sunlight.

"It is not known yet how the disaster happened. One suggestion is that the *St. Michel* broke her propeller shaft in the gale, and drifted on the Caskets. As yet there is no news of any survivors."

Words—words—black letters on a page. He read on.

"We give a list of the names of some of the passengers who were known to be on the boat."

In that list Clare read:

"Mrs. Avis Clare—wife of the well-known scientist."

Then he awoke. Those last words seemed to tear his heart open. "The well-known scientist!" He choked—bent low over the gate—and stared at the pebbles in the path as though he were looking down into the depths of the sea. Where was she lying, this woman who had loved him, and whose life this science of his had filled with a tragic loneliness? Had she struggled; had the green and choking hand of the sea crushed her white throat in a moment of horror? Had she cried out for help? Why had he not been there? In death she had been alone; and in life he had left her lonely.

Hardly knowing what he did Jordan Clare went back to the house. He wandered upstairs, and through the doorway of their bedroom saw the two maids putting clean linen on the bed. He said nothing. He did not interfere with them. It still seemed to him incredible that those white sheets would never enfold her dear body.

He was stunned. The passively conscious part of him remained awake, but the power of decision and of action was in abeyance. He went and hid himself in the pine woods, sitting at the foot of a tree with his hands clasped behind his neck.

"What should he do?"

Reason told him that he should go down to Southampton and try to discover whether there was any

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glimmer of hope. There was a car for hire in the village, or he could catch a train at Basingstoke—yet he did not go. He could not get himself to act, or even to believe that there was any hope to inspire such an action. Avis was dead. His anguish was obstinate in its despair.

Days seemed to have elapsed when he heard the luncheon gong sounding. Mechanically, like an automaton, he got up and returned to the house. The copy of the morning paper was in his pocket; he pressed his hand to the crumpled bulge it made, and realized that the women would have to be told.

Kate, the parlourmaid, a precise woman of forty, was standing by the sideboard. Clare sat down in his chair.

"You need not wait, Kate. I will help myself."

The woman paused at the door.

"Excuse me, sir, but can you tell me whether the mistress will be back to dinner?"

Jordan Clare flinched. He simply could not tell this woman that Avis was dead.

"I don't know, Kate. We may have a wire."

"Then we will prepare for two, sir."

She closed the door, and Clare pushed aside the plates and dishes and hid his face in his arms.

No one saw him again during the afternoon. The food on the table had not been touched; the cloth was crumpled up, the plates and dishes in disorder. Kate, the precise woman, was not astonished. She had discovered the fact that a great scientist may be the most inexact and eccentric of creatures.

"Nice sort of man to be married to," was her judgment. "Poor Mrs. Clare! If ever I marry I'll marry a kind-hearted fool."

Clare was out on the heath wandering in the autumn sunlight and being tortured by the beauty of a world that seemed to float in a mist of yellow light. The colours and the scents of it hurt him. His naked

soul bruised itself against the impersonal beauty of nature, against familiar things that had lost the illusion of human friendliness. He saw nature as she was, a force that cared nothing for the emotions of a man—a furnace into which everything was thrust to be mercilessly and inevitably renewed. Man is a rebel. He is alone. All the mysterious outreachings of his soul touch nothing, rouse no vibrations, save in that other soul, the woman who is his mate. The invisible spirit wire was snapped. He was alone, alone with Nature whose eyes saw him not, and whose heart was a stone.

Gradually a slow anger stirred in him. He had been tricked, fooled, led away to puddle with little messes in his laboratory, while the miraculous emanation of life was leaking away into space. He had been playing with scientific marbles, scrawling pot-hooks in Nature's copy-book, while all the living world of a woman's love had blossomed and passed outside his window. All this damned cleverness—what did it matter? Could not any child ask him questions that would make him appear the veriest fool! Supposing he had discovered some new element, some perfectly useless entity, and tagged a learned name to it, would he or the world have been any the happier? He had put a woman's love into his crucibles and his retorts, and now that nothing but the dust was left he realized his folly.

His anger grew.

He went back to his home, and entering the garden, stood in front of the little white building in which he had hung up his soul like an old forgotten coat on a nail. It was this building that had made her lonely, sent her across the sea, drowned her in it, and left him with nothing but that letter. He wanted to punish some intangible enemy. He wanted to light a funeral pyre to her.

And then the thought came to him

The Black Spider

in the midst of his anger. His face became a white passion. He unlocked the door of the building and, entering it, looked round with eyes of hatred at all its apparatus of science. Never had he thought it possible for a man to hate inanimate things with such ferocity. There was nothing of her here, nothing. The polished, glass shapes seemed to swell themselves with infernal and insolent laughter.

He picked up an iron furnace rod and went round smashing. Big-bellied jars collapsed and ceased to smile at him with smeary mockery in their eyes. Glass crashed and cracked. He prized the very shelves from the walls and brought down a ruin of books and bottles. His face had a divine anger, the anger of a Christ cleansing the Temple. He trampled his so-called Science under his feet, and scourged the back of the devil of too much wisdom.

But he had not finished, nor was his anger exhausted.

He began to pile everything inflammable he could find into a great heap against one of the walls—books, stools, bookcases, benches, boxes, cupboards. He even carried in faggots from the pile under the Scotch firs and armfuls of bracken, and he soaked the whole mass with paraffin. Dusk was hanging in the tops of the trees when he had completed his preparations, and he went out and waited for the darkness. The afterglow melted out of the sky, and a few stars began to shine.

Just before the last light faded Jordan Clare entered the white building and put a match to the bracken. It flared up, and as he stood for the moment at the door he seemed to see some black thing writhing and twisting in the far corner of the great room. He stepped out quickly and locked the door.

"You shan't escape, you devil, you black spider. Burn, curse you. burn!"

He stood on the lawn and watched. The big windows were lit up, and

looked like frightened, dilated eyes, the pupils showing red. All sorts of noises seemed to come from the place—cracklings, hissings, roarings, a tearing sound, as though some evil creature, furious with pain, were trying to break out. Jordan Clare stood and exulted. He had lit Avis's funeral pyre. He was destroying the thing that had destroyed her.

The women came hurrying from the house.

"Oh, Mr. Clare——!"

"Oh, heavens!"

He did not look at them, and when they saw his face in the light of the burning building they thought him mad.

"I did it," he said. "I want it burnt. Go in."

They were frightened, and so scared of him that they ran away down the lane towards the village.

The building was now a cage of yellow fire, and the noise of its burning was so great that Jordan Clare did not hear that other sound rising out of the valley. A touring car was climbing the hill, its yellow eyes big with astonishment. A woman, half standing, half kneeling on the seat, was looking up at that flaming cresset on the hill-top with its circle of glowing firs.

"It is the pavilion," she said to herself. "His workroom." And to the driver: "Faster, faster."

Jordan Clare was still standing on the lawn when the car stopped at the gate. The roof had just fallen in with an upward rush of sparks and of flame, and the noise of the fire was like the roaring of a furnace. The woman saw his figure black against the glow—arms spread, head raised exultantly.

"Jordan!"

Her voice reached Clare like the cry of one drowned at sea, a ghost cry rising above the tumult of the waters. He stood very still, as though in doubt as to his own sanity.

This time the voice was human, "Jordan!"

By Warwick Deeping

quick and tender. He turned, and saw her coming out of the darkness into the light—a pale woman with eyes of yearning, wrapped in an old cloak the hood of which had fallen back so that her hair glimmered like a halo.

"Avis!"

"My darling!"

He gave a strange cry, and, going to her, took her in his arms.

"My God, you are real; you breathe, you are warm."

"Dear, how you tremble! Oh—my dear—I came at once——"

He bent down and put his lips to her cheek, and the cold softness of it sent a spasm of awe through him.

"Avis, I thought you were dead."

"Some of us were picked up by a fishing boat. I rushed here from Southampton."

"Oh, my dear!"

He broke down and hid his face on her shoulder, and she held him and spoke to him as though she were comforting a child.

"How did it happen? What a tragedy for you! Is everything burnt?"

And suddenly he understood the greatness of her, and the beauty of the love that she gave to him. He raised his head, and holding her in the hollow of his arm, turned towards the burning building.

"I did it. I set it alight."

"You——!"

"Yes. When your letter came, I understood. When I thought that you were dead—I knew how I loved you and I hated that place—that black spider that was spinning a web round me! It is dead."

They stood in silence, unutterably happy.

"Oh, Dan, you know that I love you."

He bent and kissed her mouth, holding her so close that she could scarcely breathe.

"We will build it again," she whispered.

"No," he answered her; "never."

She laid a hand gently on his head.

"Yes. It is part of your life, dear, and of mine. But let me build it with you—let me be there instead of the black spider."

WARWICK DEEPING.



IN NEXT MONTH'S

STORY-TELLER

Will appear the first of a new series of stories entitled

The Seven Conundrums

BY

E. PHILLIPS OPPENHEIM

It is a fine set of tensely dramatic episodes, having to do with a mystery man and a group of play-actors—material out of which no author can extract greater interest and allure than does Mr. Oppenheim

WARWICK DEEPING'S

Powerful "human problem" story—

The Black Spider

ON the opposite page Mr. Warwick Deeping states his frank view of the problem, admirably stated but inevitably left unanswered, in the following story. The problem is one of intense interest both to those who have made the experiment of marital comradeship and to those to whom the prospect of sharing life and work presents a variety of doubts and difficulties.

What is your opinion? The Editor invites you to take up the challenge expressed in Mr. Deeping's essay, and to give your own considered judgment of the questions aroused in his fine study of a difficult theme. See panel on page 79.

IN Dinant, with the autumn wind blowing from the south-west over the Breton moors, Avis Clare wrote this letter to her husband:

MY DARLING,—How shall I begin this letter to you, and how shall I end it? It is because I love you so much that I have the courage to tell you all that is in my heart.

My little holiday is at an end. Ida is packing while I write, and I sit at my window and look out over a landscape that cries out to me: "Autumn is here."

You sent me away because you thought that I was not well. I was not well, dear, because I was lonely and because my heart had begun to be afraid. I must tell you the truth, for you are the most truthful of men; but sometimes clever men are a little blind.

In two days I shall come back to you, but this letter goes to-night, and I want you to read it before you see me in the flesh.

Oh, my dear, it is not to reproach you that I confess that my life was growing very lonely.

Did you ever suspect? No, I know that you did not, or this letter would never have been written.

But your work! How proud I am of it—even though it was hurting my heart. It

absorbed you, it exhausted you, it drew you away from me and shut the doors against my love. It began by being our child—but it was becoming my tragedy. Do you remember how I used to come into the laboratory and sit on a stool and make you coffee, and how we chattered like children? Your work was a child then; it laughed and held out its hands to me, but in a little while it grew up into a grim, lean thing that was jealous. It frowned at me when I came. It got between us, and made you silent and preoccupied. It put a hand on my breast, and tried to push me away. And last summer I ceased to come to you in that big room. Did you notice it? Oh—my dear—how lonely I was!

I began to be afraid of this thing—this work, this demon. It seemed to threaten me—"Fool woman, keep your soft hands out of my man's life. Ambition is hard—it is merciless. The soul of this man is mine, not yours."

I love you, dear, and I was frightened. This thing had become so big; there seemed no room for me beside it. That was why I came away.

And now I am coming back to you. I know that you love me, and I ask you—do not let this Work Beast crush me out of your life.

APRIL 1934 ARGOSY

Can a Woman Share Her Husband's Career?

SPECIAL INTRODUCTION BY THE AUTHOR

TO be candid, this particular story was written as the result of an emotional experience, one of those experiences that let light into a man's life. I need not specify the nature of the experience. Some reactions may be too intimate for self-advertisement.

On the larger issue I can speak with some confidence. Probably, the situation is somewhat unique in which a woman can so far sink her immediate self as to give herself to her husband's career. Creative man can be an exacting creature, self-centred, purblind. Many of the moderns would condemn such self-surrender in a wife. They might even call it mental prostitution. They could point to many tragedies in which the woman had given her all, and been taken for granted.

But that there can be beauty and success in such a relationship I have no doubt at all. I personally, have experienced such help, and, base male though one may be, one is not blind to the things a woman can bring into life. They do not come noisily. They arrive like flowers. They may fill the house with a sense of peace and a subtle savour of understanding. They create an atmosphere soothing to some sensitive, unstable craftsman. And if he is wise and not completely a pedant or a prig, he will give thanks to the comrade who has given him what no other power on earth can give, the solaces and inspiration of a beautiful unselfishness.

Does the woman get nothing in return? I think that she may be more blessed in the return of the bread she has cast upon the water, than her more urgent and formidable sisters who insist upon a more emancipated individualism. WARWICK DEEPING

Do you know that the heart of a woman yearns to help? It was my ambition to build a sort of magic wall around you, so that the little petty things of life should never disturb you. It was I who gave you the thinker's tranquillity. It is the boast of my love and not the cry of my vanity.

I have written this letter, and how shall I end it save as a woman? I love you.

—AVIS.

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little classic building with big neo-Georgian windows overlooking the heath country and the hills, set more than a stone's-throw from the house, and sheltered by old Scotch firs. The man was there in his old shabby Norfolk jacket frayed at the cuffs and stained by chemicals. He stood by one of the big windows, holding a test tube over the flame of a Bunsen burner, his face intent and serene. He did not look at the landscape, or the gold of the autumn woods, or the vast, rusty sweeps of heather. He was absorbed, forgetful of everything. The

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TWO prizes, one of three guineas and one of two guineas, will be awarded to the readers who send in the best essays on the above "problem." Essays should be not more than three hundred words in length and should be addressed to The Editor, "The Argosy," Tallis House, Tallis Street, E.C. 4, in time to reach this office before April 30th, 1934.

A selection of these essays will be published in the "Argosy" for June, when the result of the competition will also be announced.

The Black Spider

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"Six o'clock, sir. You haven't touched your tea."

"I'm busy," said the man at the bench.

HE went on with his work, while the dusk filled the big white room with all its polished, scientific gear, its glass cases, its books, its rows and rows of bottles. It became grey, and in one corner some conglomeration of wires, rods and piping grew to the likeness of a spider's web. Avis had seen it thus, and hanging in the web she had imagined a black spider—this man's evil genius, the spirit of forgetfulness and of selfish spiritual death.

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And then the flow of his consciousness reached the edge of memory.

"Avis comes back to-morrow. She's better. I'm glad. Change. Yes—she wanted change."

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"Avis crosses to-morrow."

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"My God—what a selfish beast I have been!"

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At breakfast, as he poured out his tea, he said to himself: "Her hands will do it to-morrow."

He ate very little, for his hunger was not of the flesh. The laboratory was locked, and he did not touch the key, and when he went into the sunny spaces of the garden, he felt a curious and sudden horror of that white building—that scientific box without a soul. He lit a pipe and went and stood

by the gate, thinking that she might send a telegram to tell him the time of her train.

The road curved below, sweeping up the side of the hill, and on it Jordan Clare saw something that moved. It was the paper boy cycling up from the village with the morning papers, and Clare watched him as he might have watched a beetle crawling up the wall.

The boy dismounted at the gate. He was sandy-haired and freckled, with pale, unpleasant eyes. His collar was dirty and his boots had not been cleaned. He wheeled his bicycle to the gate and handed Clare the paper.

"Good morning," said the man.

"Morning," echoed the boy, and mounting, rode off.

Jordan Clare opened the paper.

Disaster in the Channel. Southampton boat lost with all hands.

He did not realize it at first. The thing seemed too absurd, too tragic, too overwhelming. He stood there, still puffing at his pipe, holding the paper spread upon the top of the gate, reading it as though the news meant nothing. Then a voice of dismay seemed to cry out in the distance, but it was like a voice from some spirit world that was strange to him. He read on, standing very still in the sunlight.

It is not known yet how the disaster happened. One suggestion is that the *St. Michael* broke her propeller shaft in the gale, and drifted on the Caskets. As yet there is no news of any survivors.

Words—words—black letters on a page. He read on.

We give a list of the names of some of the passengers who were known to be on the boat.

In that list Clare read:

Mrs. Avis Clare—wife of the well-known scientist.

Then he awoke. Those last words seemed to tear his heart open. "The well-known scientist!" He choked—bent low over the gate—and stared at the pebbles in the path as though he were looking down into the depths of the sea. Where was she lying, this woman who had loved him, and whose life this science of his had filled with a tragic loneliness? Had she struggled; had the green and choking hand of the sea crushed her white throat in a moment of horror? Had she cried out for help? Why had he not been there? In death she had been alone; and in life he had left her lonely.

The Black Spider

Hardly knowing what he did, Jordan Clare went back to the house. He was stunned. The passively conscious part of him remained awake, but the power of decision and of action was in abeyance. He went and hid himself in the pine woods, sitting at the foot of a tree with his hands clasped behind his neck.

"What should he do?"

Reason told him that he should go down to Southampton and try to discover whether there was any glimmer of hope. There was a car for hire in the village, or he could catch a train at Basingstoke—yet he did not go. He could not get himself to act, or even to believe that there was any hope to inspire such an action. Avis was dead. His anguish was obstinate in its despair.

DAYS seemed to have elapsed when he heard the luncheon gong sounding. Mechanically, he got up and returned to the house. The copy of the morning paper was in his pocket; he pressed his hand to the crumpled bulge it made, and realized that the women would have to be told.

Kate, the parlourmaid, a precise woman of forty, was standing by the sideboard. Clare sat down in his chair.

"You need not wait, Kate."

The woman paused at the door.

"Excuse me, sir, but can you tell me whether the mistress will be back to dinner?"

Jordan Clare flinched. He simply could not tell this woman that Avis was dead.

"I don't know, Kate. We may have a wire."

She closed the door, and Clare pushed aside the plates and dishes and hid his face in his arms.

No one saw him again during the afternoon. The food on the table had not been touched; the cloth was crumpled up, the plates and dishes in disorder. Kate, the precise woman, was not astonished.

"Nice sort of man to be married to," was her judgment. "Poor Mrs. Clare! If ever I marry I'll marry a kind-hearted fool."

Clare was out on the heath wandering in the autumn sunlight and being tortured by the beauty of a world that seemed to float in a mist of yellow light. The colours and the scents of it hurt him. His naked soul bruised itself against the impersonal beauty of nature, against familiar things

that had lost the illusion of human friendliness. He saw nature as she was, a force that cared nothing for the emotions of a man—a furnace into which everything was thrust to be mercilessly and inevitably renewed. Man is a rebel. He is alone. All the mysterious outreachings of his soul touch nothing, rouse no vibrations, save in that other soul, the woman who is his mate. The invisible spirit wire was snapped. He was alone.

Gradually a slow anger stirred in him. He had been tricked, fooled, led away to puddle with little messes in his laboratory; while the miraculous emanation of life was leaking away into space. He had been playing with scientific marbles, scrawling pot-hooks in Nature's copy-book, while all the living world of a woman's love had blossomed and passed outside his window. All this damned cleverness—what did it matter? Could not any child ask him questions that would make him appear the veriest fool! Supposing he had discovered some new element, some perfectly useless entity, and tagged a learned name to it, would he or the world have been any the happier? He had put a woman's love into his crucibles and his retorts, and now that nothing but the dust was left he realized his folly.

His anger grew.

He went back to his home, and entering the garden, stood in front of the little white building in which he had hung up his soul like an old forgotten coat on a nail. It was this building that had made her lonely, sent her across the sea, drowned her in it, and left him with nothing but that letter. He wanted to punish some intangible enemy.

And then the thought came to him in the midst of his anger. His face became a white passion. He unlocked the door of the building and, entering it, looked round with eyes of hatred at all its apparatus of science. Never had he thought it possible for a man to hate inanimate things with such ferocity. There was nothing of her here, nothing. The polished, glass shapes seemed to swell themselves with infernal and insolent laughter.

He picked up an iron furnace rod and went round smashing. Big-bellied jars collapsed and ceased to smile at him with smeary mockery in their eyes. Glass crashed and cracked. He prized the very shelves from the walls and brought down

a ruin of books and bottles. His face had a divine anger, the anger of a Christ cleansing the Temple.

He began to pile everything inflammable he could find into a great heap against one of the walls—books, stools, bookcases, benches, boxes, cupboards. He even carried in faggots from the pile under the Scotch firs and armfuls of bracken, and he soaked the whole mass with paraffin. Dusk was hanging in the tops of the trees when he had completed his preparations, and he went out and waited for the darkness.

Just before the last light faded Jordan Clare entered the white building and put a match to the bracken. It flared up, and as he stood for the moment at the door he seemed to see some black thing writhing and twisting in the far corner of the great room. He stepped back quickly and locked the door.

He stood on the lawn and watched. The big windows were lit up, and looked like frightened, dilated eyes, the pupils showing red. All sorts of noises seemed to come from the place—cracklings, hissings, roarings, a tearing sound, as though some evil creature, furious with pain, were trying to break out. Jordan Clare stood and exulted. He had lit Avis's funeral pyre. He was destroying the thing that had destroyed her.

The women came hurrying from the house.

"Oh, Mr. Clare!"

"Oh, Heavens!"

He did not look at them, and when they saw his face in the light of the burning building they thought him mad.

"I did it," he said. "I want it burnt. Go in."

They were frightened, and so scared of him that they ran away down the lane towards the village.

The building was now a cage of yellow fire, and the noise of its burning was so great that Jordan Clare did not hear that other sound rising out of the valley. A touring car was climbing the hill, its yellow eyes big with astonishment. A woman, half-standing, half-kneeling on the seat, was looking up at that flaming cresset on the hill-top with its circle of glowing firs.

"It is the pavilion," she said to herself. "His workshop." And to the driver: "Faster, faster."

Jordan Clare was still standing on the lawn when the car stopped at the gate. The roof had just fallen in with an upward rush

of sparks and of flame, and the noise of the fire was like the roaring of a furnace. The woman saw his figure black against the glow—arms spread, head raised exultantly.

"Jordan!"

Her voice reached Clare like the cry of one drowned at sea, a ghost cry rising above the tumult of the waters. He stood very still.

"Jordan!"

This time the voice was human, quick and tender. He turned, and saw her coming out of the darkness into the light—a pale woman with eyes of yearning, wrapped in an old cloak the hood of which had fallen back so that her hair glimmered.

"Avis!"

"My darling!"

He gave a strange cry, and, going to her, took her in his arms.

"My God, you are real; you breathe, you are warm."

"Dear, how you tremble! Oh—my dear—I came at once——"

He bent down and put his lips to her cheek, and the cold softness of it sent a spasm of awe through him.

"Avis, I thought you were dead."

"Some of us were picked up by a fishing boat. I rushed here from Southampton."

"Oh, my dear!"

He broke down and hid his face on her shoulder, and she held him and spoke to him as though she were comforting a child.

"How did it happen? What a tragedy for you! Is everything burnt?"

And suddenly he understood the greatness of her, and the beauty of the love that she gave to him. He raised his head, and holding her in the hollow of his arm, turned towards the burning building.

"I did it. I set it alight."

"You——!"

"Yes. When your letter came, I understood. When I thought that you were dead—I knew how I loved you and I hated that place—that black spider that was spinning a web round me! It is dead."

They stood in silence, unutterably happy.

"Oh, Dan, you know that I love you."

He bent and kissed her mouth.

"We will build it again," she whispered.

"No," he answered her; "never."

She laid a hand gently on his head.

"Yes. It is part of your life, dear, and of mine. But let me build it with you—let me be there instead of the black spider."

The Things that Matter

In his search for happiness he craved for excitement, notoriety, fame, and yet he had happiness at his side and did not see it

By Warwick Deeping



HE had not seen him for three years.

She waited for him at the barrier, a little woman, fragile, refined, sensitive, with the quiet brown eyes of one who listened better than she talked. She was wearing black furs, and her face seemed to float in the soft collar like a delicate flower upon dark water. She suggested fragrance, courage, a spirit of understanding that was as quick to respond with laughter or sighings as a pine-wood answers the wind, and yet—for all her air of fragility—there was a sturdiness about her that made grosser, duller women appear ineffectual and slow.

"Stephen!"

She waved a gloved hand. In the thick of the outpouring crowd he was looking over people's heads and missing the woman who mattered. She had one vivid glance of his face before he saw her, a tanned and rather boyish face, alert, questing, with vivid blue eyes. He was still in uniform. He looked the same and yet different. The difference puzzled her. She was conscious of a vague, momentary shock, an intuitive yet inexplicable sense of insecurity.

"Seven years," was her thought; "four years—my husband, three years a stranger. What is it?"

Next moment he had her by the hands.

"Kitty."

He kissed her. It was a lover's kiss and it thrilled her, and yet there was something in it that made her shrink a little, though the shrinking was inward and not obvious to him. That kiss made her think of a man who had been starved and deprived of all chances of self-expression, a man who had been let out of

prison and who now rushed at life and clutched at it with over-eager hands.

"You haven't grown!" he said, laughing.

"Not even in grace!"

"Oh, I'll not argue that! Where are we going?"

"I have taken a room at the Talbot. We go down to 'Beeches' to-morrow."

He paused, glanced round, signalled to the porter who had his kit, and then moved through the crowd, holding her arm.

"I say—this is good! I used to lie in my tent and think of all this——"

Glancing up she was aware of his restless, questioning eyes, and of his sensitive and dilated nostrils.

"Was it dull—the desert?"

"Dull! Sand, heat, and three or four middle-class gentlemen who had read nothing but the daily paper and their trade journals for the last ten years. Oh, help!"

"Well, you were able to write."

He smiled.

"That last book of mine didn't do so badly, though the ass of a censor cut it about. We are going to do big things; I'm stoked up like a furnace. Where's our taxi?"

They had to wait for a taxi, and she discovered the fact that waiting irritated him. She noticed an impatience that had not existed in the man-boy with whom she had lived so happily for those four years before the war. He stood throwing quick, impatient glances about the station yard.

"Good heavens! What's our fellow doing?"

Kitty was watching her husband's face. It had a restless, chafed expression, and somehow it made her think of a sensitive face beaten upon and worn by a perpetual stream of wind-blown sand.

A taxi arrived and they drove off to

their hotel, and in the taxi he became the boy lover and husband she remembered. His face lost its fierce look, that air of straining after things that had been unobtainable on the desert.

"Little woman, I did not know you were quite so pretty!"

She let herself be drawn close.

"Am I?"

"Adorable."

"I am glad."

She rested herself against him and smiled at London and its lights that were blotting out the gradual dusk. She felt the pressure of his arm; sometimes it trembled a little.

"He was tired," she thought; "perhaps it was that."

The rest of that evening was a complex of emotions, and the human part of it was so dominant, so vivid in its colours that Kitty Westmacott had no time to notice the subtler and more sensitive shades. She was a woman, and to this man of hers a thing of wonder, fragrance, mystery, and desire. She had expected a lover; she had prepared herself for a lover, fondly and exultantly; she had remembered all the feminine details—the new frock, the delicate lingerie, the faint perfume that was more a suggestion than a scent. The material part of her mattered; no woman of understanding forgets that, though it is but a beautiful sheath, a radiance surrounding that other and more sacred radiance.

They dined, and he looked at her and at nothing else. Later, she was astonished by his passion; it swept her away, engulfed her with a tenderness that was almost fierce.

In a while he fell asleep, but Kitty remained awake, for the woman in her had risen clear-eyed above the glowing mist of her emotions. She lay very still, feeling, thinking. She stretched out a tentative shy hand and touched him as he slept.

"Has the past come back, or is it a beginning, a beginning over again? Are you the same, dear man—I wonder?"

II

It was a spring day, very soft and still, and the windows of the white house looked across beds of wallflowers and tulips at the wood of old beech trees across the lane. The house and the garden were old, but

not so very old; in fact, they were quite youthful in comparison with those venerable trees.

Beyond them rose a steepish hill covered with Scotch firs, heather, bracken and gorse, and when a wind blew these tall firs would be sailing against the blue, while the beech wood below was like still, green water in a cavern. Kitty loved both these woods, so different in their temperaments and in the moods they instigated, and in the old days Westmacott had loved them with her.

"But now——!"

She was sitting at her oak bureau in the corner of the little drawing-room, a favourite place of hers, for between the writing of her letters she could glance down into the garden or across the lane at the beech trees and dream for a minute. It had been her corner of dreams during the war, and here at this desk she had written her letters to a lonely, restive man somewhere between Port Said and Suez. Much of her inward self seemed hidden away in the pigeon-holes and the ivory-knobbed drawers of that old desk. She had begun to wonder whether her dreams were not to be put away in some recess.

Kitty paused in the middle of a letter and remained very still. Westmacott had come out into the garden, and she saw him standing by one of the beds of wallflowers and tulips and staring at the beech trees across the lane. She had a suspicion that he did not see those trees, nor was he aware of her at the window. He had his hands in his trousers pockets; he stooped; his eyes, hard and set, seemed to be looking at things a long way off. His whole figure suggested a rebellious listlessness, boredom. The man was not happy.

Then he turned and saw her face watching him through the open window, and he looked annoyed.

She ignored his look of annoyance. Her life was becoming a conscious effort to ignore certain things. She loved this man very dearly, so dearly that she could smile and hide her wounds, and he never suspected that there could be wounds. He may have thought her too conventional, too quietly cheerful. He wanted noise.

"I am going to the Tressiders' this afternoon," she said, "but I won't drag you there."

"I can't say that I am keen."

Her head was poised studiously.

"I was going to ask you to go up to town for me."

"What for?"

"We want some things from the Stores." She paused. "And you could go to your club. Why not go to see that new piece at the Haymarket and tell me what it is like."

"I might," he said. "Do you mind?"

She smiled. She saw that he wanted to go.

Her curiosity was compassionate and anxious when she went into his study and glanced at the manuscript lying on his untidy desk. She bent over his chair and looked at the half-finished page. Even the writing looked hurried, restive, impatient. Half-way through a paragraph she came across a phrase that seemed to go straight to her heart—"This green death; this succulent, living grave."

"Oh, my dear," she thought, "is it as hard as that? And I had dreamed that you would love what my love had tried to create for you."

A woman's love is protective, and sometimes it is infinitely wise, and Kitty felt that she knew Stephen so much better than he knew himself. He had come back to her a passionate and undisciplined child, greedy for excitement, so full of strong animal life that older and more sensitive harness would not hold him. He was suffering from an enlarged egotism. It made him restless, drove him to desire abnormal self-expression, power, display. He had the vanity of a child. He had lost his sense of humour, his appreciation of all the more delicate and subtle shades of life.

"Perhaps it was bound to happen," she thought, looking at those quiet trees. "The war took men and threw them back a hundred years. He's just a blind, blundering, passionate boy."

She saw the tragic chances of the affair, but she set herself resolutely against accepting tragedy as inevitable. She knew that his work would suffer; it had suffered already. She knew that his love for her might suffer, or be replaced by something raw and transient. This man of hers had to be re-educated, gently, tenderly, with infinite motherly patience.

He came back late from town, and she felt almost that he wished that she was

asleep in bed. A woman who waits and who asks questions is such a complication!

"Had a good time?"

He lit a pipe. He was a curious mixture of reticence and restlessness. She knew how men had amused themselves during the war; she remembered those young faces straining towards physical self-expression—the life on the edge of death—and Westmacott was still like that, for he had been unable to spend himself in Egypt. She noticed that he was flushed, and jerky in his movements. She knew, too, discerning it as women discern things, that he would not tell her all that he had done and seen.

"Met Royds at the club. He's making three thousand a year."

"He might do. Does that pique you?"

"Why not?"

He did not look at her. The egoist in him was sufficiently sensitive to be vaguely aware of her hostility to Royds and Royds's philosophy, and her hostility annoyed him. She was always so much the angel in the path, a little woman with wise and waiting eyes.

"Why not make money? It gives one scope—elbow room. If Royds can do it—"

"Yes, Royds can do it."

"You mean I can't?"

"You are not Royds," she said.

His pipe had gone out, and he relit it as though he had a grievance against the pipe.

"Anyhow, he gave me some advice. I oughtn't to bury myself down here. I ought to get about—push, meet people. Everybody does it. You have got to advertise yourself. Royds told me that he doubled his sales when he began to push himself, and to give lectures and ask people to dinner. He has managed to work the films, and he has a play coming on."

"I see."

She sat very still.

"Is Royds married?"

"Rather. His wife—"

He hesitated and smothered some very obvious suggestion.

"Oh, yes, I remember," she said. "She was quite prominent during the war. But, Steve, I should like to ask you a question."

"Well?"

"Do you really believe that you can

compete with a little self-advertising cad like Royds?"

He looked at her sulkily.

"I haven't had what I deserve. Why should I be crowded out by a lot of sensational cheap-jacks? I want a public, a big public, like the big men, Wells or Bennett. If a man has to be a bit blatant—whose fault is it?"

"Every man's," she said, and, smiling at him, rose to go to bed.

III

It was an extravagant bit of business, but they took a furnished flat in town not very far from Baker Street, and left the white house except for occasional weekends. Westmacott explained at the club: "My wife took it. Women are better at these things than men. Our little place in the country was too Victorian."

It was quite true that Kitty had taken the flat, and her acquiescence in a gayer sort of life had puzzled Westmacott for half an hour. The explanation seemed so obvious that he accepted it at once. Kitty was quite ready to live what he called the gayer sort of life; the war had bucked people up, taught them to enjoy things.

"We ought to give a dinner—a christening dinner, you know."

"Whom shall I ask?"

"Oh, I want the Roydses, and Mason—my publisher. Royds has introduced me to Eckstein of the Universal Films. It would be policy to ask Eckstein—and one or two merry girls."

"Perhaps you will ask Eckstein?"

"Yes, I'd better."

"I don't think I know any girls—"

"There are the Bucks—the Bucks would do."

She looked at him with wide-open, intelligent eyes.

"You mean—they would suit Mr. Eckstein?"

He caught the inward sarcasm of the remark, though she had not meant to be sarcastic.

"Why, what's wrong with the Bucks? They are the new style, I know. Molly did jolly well driving an ambulance in France."

"I will ask them," she said.

And then she added: "Steve, dear, you know it is going to be rather expensive.

I shall have to order a dinner in, and then, of course, there will be wine."

He answered her with the large air of a man of the world.

"Publicity, old girl. If we hook Eckstein—it will be worth it."

So the dinner was arranged, a dinner that was to be followed by many more dinners. Kitty went about it all with a sense of unreality and a feeling of spiritual nausea which she suppressed. She had seen the path before her and she meant to follow it; she did not argue or plead; she scarcely even hinted at her own other-worldliness. Yet, she was amazed. It seemed to her almost incredible that the romantic and rather unsophisticated boy of five years ago should be cheated by this materialism, let himself be inflamed by the cheap lust for notoriety and money.

And yet she could not, and did not, believe that the change in her husband was permanent. His old self was submerged, drugged. He was in a fever—the fever of living on his senses; the whole rhythm of life had been altered, speeded up. It was as though his heart beat twice as rapidly, and his brain was fed on overheated blood. That green valley in Surrey had bored him; the tranquil breathing of its trees had been too slow for him. He had lost the inward vision. She wished to bring that inward vision back.

The Roydses were the first to arrive, Royds, a little hard-faced bantam of a man, following his large and flamboyant wife. They were assertive people; they had cultivated the art of being prominent in a crowd. Natalie Royds was what Kitty called a "poster figure," a thunder-clap of colour, all cerise and naked bust. They patronized without meaning to patronize, flung commands at you like advertisements on a hoarding—"Use Boulter's Bath Salts!"

"Congratulate you, Mrs. Westmacott," said Royds. "You have done the right thing for Westmacott."

"It is so good of you to say so. You don't believe in the country?"

She was as mild as milk—hiding all the sparkle of her irony.

"Your man needs a little puffing, you know."

His air of patronage both amused and annoyed her, but the Buck girls "blew

THE THINGS THAT MATTER

in" and distracted her attention from this pretentious and worldly little clown. Westmacott came in with them; he was late, and had had trouble with his tie.

"Well, how goes it?"

"What a priceless little place you've got."

The Bucks were noisy, good-natured young women, hard as nails, colloquial, advertising much arm and leg. Mr. Mason arrived in the midst of the hubbub-bubble they had created, a rather quiet man who hid a sensitive second-self behind an eye-glass and a stiff countenance. He looked at the Roydses and seemed puzzled, and Kitty liked him for that air of perplexity.

Mr. Eckstein kept them waiting. When he did arrive you realized the cleverness of the man who kept half the world guessing on his doorstep. He looked like a cake of white soap with two black buttons for eyes. He was the sort of man whom Kitty pictured smoking an eternal cigar and smiling a vague and smeary smile that meant everything and nothing.

She gained many impressions from that dinner—glimpses of people in the nakedness of their posing. The Buck girls chattered and flirted; Mrs. Royds maintained a perpetual recitative in her gushing contralto; Royds advertised himself; Mason looked polite and vaguely uncomfortable; Eckstein ate and stared at Kitty. Westmacott talked a great deal—like a man who has stepped down from his dignity and is playing at being a shop-walker in his sleep. There was the faintest suggestion of obsequiousness in his attitude towards Eckstein.

Kitty could have cuffed him. The very stupidity of the business touched her—roused in her a little flame of pity, tenderness, humiliation, shame. The real inwardness of it became painfully obvious to her. She understood almost at once that Eckstein did not care a fig for Westmacott and his work, but that he might be interested in Westmacott's wife.

And she ignored Eckstein; he was the enemy—the symbol of all the things that were hateful to her fastidious and sensitive soul. She talked to Mason, divining behind that eye-glass and that quiet manner a wisdom that saw and understood.

About eleven o'clock they chartered two taxis and drove off to the Beyrout Club

to dance. Westmacott had drunk more wine than a man should drink when he means to write clearly and naturally next morning. He danced a good deal with Mrs. Royds, while Royds and Mason took charge of the Buck girls. Kitty did not dance, neither did Mr. Eckstein.

He sat with her on one of the red plush settees, and Mason, catching a glimpse of them over Miss Rosita Buck's shoulder, was reminded of a thrush and a toad. Eckstein's double chin and mouth were exactly like a toad's.

Kitty felt his eyes appraising her. They were eyes that touched, fingered things.

"Ever been filmed, Mrs. Westmacott?"

"No," she said, "never."

He smiled. Snubs slid off his thick and soapy skin.

"You'd be a better proposition than your husband's books."

"They are not books that would film."

"I'm glad that you agree with me."

"No, they are too good to be filmed."

He gave her a sly, intimate look.

"You see, it's like this. We have half the novelists in the country throwing their books at us, leaving 'em on our doorstep. If Westmacott wants to be filmed——"

"He would have to write what you want?"

"Isn't that business? A woman like you understands business; look at Royds's wife——"

He glanced at the large surface of cerise and white flesh that was Mrs. Royds. He smiled a peculiar, inward sort of smile; the soapiness of him seemed to grow wet and to glisten.

"There's a publicity agent for you!"

Kitty sat as though dreaming. She appeared to have forgotten Mr. Eckstein, nor did she hurry to remember him, and when she did remember him it was with a little, quick, ironical smile.

"I'm sorry. What were you saying?"

His black eyes glistened with spite, for she had managed to penetrate his skin.

Her last impression was of Mason standing beside her, too sensitive to put the thought that was in him into words. His face still wore that look of perplexity.

"Good night, Mrs. Westmacott. I hope you are not giving up that little place in Surrey?"

She looked him straight in the eyes.

"No. It's rooted in the soil, you know."

"Good," he said. "They won't film you there."

IV

THERE are certain words that appear as dominant words at certain periods of a man's life, and for Westmacott the word of the moment was "expansion." He was always using it, talking of expanding here and expanding there, and he did not merely talk about it, he made almost fierce efforts to spread.

At first the life seemed to suit him. It was a whirl of activity, an eternal restlessness, a life that may cheat a man into believing that he is accomplishing great things. And Kitty backed her man. She had never believed in dogmatic literature, in moralizings, in sermons; she had the wisdom of restraint; she felt that this man of hers must re-educate himself. She believed that the day would come when he would discover that he was no better than a lost child.

She did not realize then how much she would have to suffer.

She did not realize that her courage and her strength might fail before this man of hers saw the light.

But there was one thing she could not, and would not, lie about—his work.

Westmacott had grown almost foolishly optimistic. He was vainer, more pleased with what he did, and he talked about it with an incessant eagerness. He still regarded her as his spiritual comrade—his secret public—his chief admirer, and he chattered to her like a boy. In the old days Kitty had read all his books in manuscript; he had always been a little restive under criticism; she felt that he would be far more so now.

Some time that summer he gave her his latest novel to read. She read it, and she was afraid. For two days she gave way to cowardice; she knew that he expected her praise, she could see it in his eyes.

Then—she knew. They had reached the first parting of the ways, the edge of the gap that might widen and widen. She had to make her choice, and she made it.

She told him the truth.

He lost his temper. His hurt vanity showed white and excited.

"I think it's the best thing I have ever

done. Of course, it is not for prudes and conventionalists——"

"It is not—you," she said.

"But—what on earth is the matter with the book?"

She was very white and steady.

"Stephen, dear, I have always been very proud of your work—you know that, don't you? But this book isn't you. Don't publish it."

He stared.

"It has got to be published. We have been spending a lot. We shall want the money."

"I would rather scrape for six months," she said, "than see that book published."

"I tell you you are wrong. Hang it all, I ought to know. I'm not exactly an amateur——"

"Has Mason seen it?" she asked quietly.

"No, but he will see it—next month. And he will jump at it."

She said nothing

But from that day Kitty noticed a perceptible change in his attitude towards her. The man part of him was still her husband, but the author part of him sulked and retired into its dignity. He never mentioned his work to her, and he did not guess how much this reticence hurt her.

About this time, too, she began to notice the arrival of those long, fat envelopes that the unsuccessful author knows so well. Stephen would come into the room in the morning, glance eagerly and rather anxiously at the letters on the breakfast table, and more than once she saw him slip one of these envelopes into his pocket as though the sight of it annoyed him.

Once or twice he blurted out his grievances.

"I can't make that chap Eckstein out. He has had some of my books for months, and I can't get anything definite out of him."

"Why not drop Mr. Eckstein?"

"He may be jolly useful. Royds says that these cinema people are extraordinarily elusive; you have got to try and pin them down. It occurred to me that we might have a little week-end party down at 'Beeches.'"

Kitty looked at him quickly across the table. She had flushed up and her eyes were very bright.



Kitty sat as though dreaming. She appeared to have forgotten Mr. Eckstein

"You mean the party to include Mr. Eckstein?"

"Of course." He thought how obtuse she was.

There was a moment's silence before Kitty answered him. He was quite unconscious of the struggle that was going on in her, of her emotion, her slightly hurried breathing.

"Stephen, I have done many things for you, but I won't have that man at 'Beeches.'"

He stared.

"Good heavens! Why not?"

But she would give no reasons. If he was so blind that he could not appreciate the delicacy of her fastidious and natural prejudices she would not try to explain.

"I simply refuse."

He was annoyed, puzzled.

"What's the matter with you?"

"There is nothing the matter with me."

"You don't like Eckstein? I know he's a bounder, and all that."

"His place is his office," she said, "please leave him there."

But she felt that the rift between them had widened, and when—about a week later—the Universal Film Company returned Westmacott's books with a rather casual letter from Mr. Eckstein stating that they were unsuitable for filming, she was conscious of relief, and also of a sense of added irritation in her husband. In some way his disappointment seemed to assume her to be partly responsible. It was as though he thought that she might have done more. She felt angry, hurt, humiliated.

The next day she received a letter from Mr. Mason the publisher.

"DEAR MRS. WESTMACOTT,—May I call and see you some afternoon this week? There is a subject I wish to discuss with you, and I wish to discuss it as your husband's friend.—Yours sincerely,

"JOHN MASON."

Kitty guessed what the subject was, Stephen's latest book. She wrote to Mr. Mason asking him to call on her on the Thursday afternoon. Stephen was going to Stoke Poges to play golf.

When Mason was shown into her little drawing-room she felt that she was in the presence of a friend.

He was a little nervous, but he lost his

nervousness when she told him that she knew why he had come.

"It is about Stephen's work?"

He nodded.

"You have read that last book of his. What do you think of it?"

"What do *you* think of it?"

"It is all wrong."

"Does he know you think that?"

"Yes, I told him. I had to. He has lost his true inspiration, his sense of touch."

Mason had dropped his eye-glass, and he played with the black ribbon.

"What's the matter with him, Mrs. Westmacott?"

She made a little movement of the shoulders.

"It's the war. He starved—mentally and emotionally—for three years. I think he came back into a fever to live. He has lost his sense of values."

"Why did you let him come to London? It is ruining his work. But, then, you know that."

"Mr. Mason," she said, "how would you deal with a restless, passionate, and grown-up child? Would you scold and preach? He was bored down there in the country, miserable, restive. He craved for excitement—notoriety—his distorted idea of fame. What was I to do? It seemed to me best to let him sow his wild oats—herd with his cheap people, play with the fire and be burnt with it. It was a hard choice for a woman to have to make, but I made it. I wanted him to rediscover life for himself. Was I wrong?"

Mason stared hard at the carpet.

"Has he learnt—anything—yet?"

"I can't say. I think not. But you know what proud, secretive creatures we are."

She saw that he was troubled.

"You feel that you cannot publish that book?"

He raised his eyes to her.

"Do you want it published, Mrs. Westmacott?"

"No," she said, "no."

Tea was brought in, and Kitty began to talk to him of other things—books, the latest plays, the spirit of restlessness, and the passion for display that possessed everybody, and the ultimate way back to cleaner and sounder living.

"I have an idea that it will do us all

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good to be poor. At present we are rather like the Gadarena swine."

"We shall be poor right enough," he said; "but the question is—has the country the patience and the grit to go through the mill? Personally, I think it has. And that leads me to something, Mrs. Westmacott. If this book is not published——?"

She understood him.

"The question of money. Thank you for having the courage to mention it. Of course, we shall be rather hard up."

"I might arrange to advance——"

"If you please, no. Don't you see what will happen? We shall have to give up this flat; we shall have to go back to the country and work. Oh, don't think me a disloyal beast for talking like this! It's because I love my husband, because I want to see him doing the work he ought to do. We used to be happy down there in the old days; we may be happy again in the future. But here! This cheap, over-stimulated, sensational life! It would kill the artist in him and disfigure me."

Mason's face had lost all its austerity.

"Mrs. Westmacott, some day he will wake up and bless you. And may I remind you that when the real book comes I shall treat it as something sacred, a part of you."

"I know you will," she said.

V

WESTMACOTT had boasted a good deal about that book. He had been spending money freely, and Kitty had watched him become the centre of a little circle of parasites who found his ostentatious generosity seasonable and convenient. He was hunted, and flattered, and petted by a little pack of fluffy girls and women and one or two amorphous men. He had provided punts at Henley; he gave dinners, took "posies" of short-skirted young women to hotel dances and night-clubs. He paid. And in return he was given exclamatory cries of adulation, which cost the women nothing.

"Oh, Mr. Westmacott, how clever you are!"

They pretended to dote upon his books, and he was persuaded into a lot of foolish trumpeting. He felt a dog, a great man, a dispenser of joy and of pleasant

patronage which gave him a false sense of power.

A brown-paper parcel and a letter, waiting on the breakfast table, shook the foundations of this artificial world. Kitty, pretending to a blindness that was not blind, waited to see what would happen. Her compassion hid in ambush.

"Damn Mason! Insolent fool!"

She looked up and saw his furious yet slightly frightened face. For the moment he had completely lost control of himself; he was shaking; his face looked thin and harsh, almost evil.

"What is it?"

She shrank a little, seeing him as a stranger, a distorted travesty of the man she loved.

"That fool Mason won't publish the book. Good heavens! what an old woman. I always thought him a confounded hypocrite."

She remained white and still.

"What does he say?"

"Say! Read it. A lot of sanctimonious, humbugging tosh! Says he is thinking of my reputation more than his own. Filthy hypocrite!"

"Stephen!" she said.

He glanced at her furiously.

"I believe you are as bad as Mason."

She met his eyes and refused to let herself flinch.

"I told you what I thought of the book."

And then she rose and came round the table to him.

"Oh, my dear, do trust me, do try and believe——"

He pushed her hands aside, and flung up out of his chair.

"Rot! You are wrong—both of you. There are a dozen men who will jump at that book. We'll see."

Kitty had more than a suspicion that he was a little less confident than he seemed. John Mason's letter and the refusal of the book had been a shock to him, one of those shocks whose salutary action a vain man tries to conceal. Westmacott was in a mood that would not admit either error or the thought of defeat. For the next four weeks he showed an aggressive arrogance that was mere armour, and rather pasteboard stuff at that.

Kitty behaved as though there was nothing wrong with their world. Perhaps she was rather more cheerful than usual

in a wisely gentle and unassertive way. There was no suggestion of superiority in her attitude towards her husband; love is a poor thing when it cries: "I told you so," and pulls the feathers from a mate's humiliation. She knew that there was humiliation at the bottom of the man's heart. He was self-absorbed, gloomy, reserved. She began to find him rather difficult to live with, but her tenderness was still all his, waiting for that moment when life would make him open his heart to her.

He said nothing about the fate of his book; he concealed his letters. He was employing a literary agent now—and she wondered with what success. He did not tell her.

But there were moments now when she felt that the sullen pride of him was breaking, though she did not think of the change as a breaking, but rather as a turning to her, a sudden revulsion towards the intimate sympathy of the past. Her love trembled a little, expectantly, longingly. She had begun to feel very lonely.

One evening he came home looking absolutely ill. The expression of his eyes had altered. He glanced at her with a mixture of furtiveness, pleading, misery that made her love for him cry out like a wounded thing. He was very near the breaking-point, and her generous spirit did not want to see him broken.

She said nothing till after dinner. It was winter now, and instead of going to his study he sat down with her before the fire. He was filling his pipe and staring fixedly at the flames.

"Steve," she said, "I'm getting terribly home-sick."

He glanced at her quickly, and then, making a spill from a piece of newspaper, he leant forward and kindled it at the fire. His tense face was lit up, but there was a softness upon it, an almost childish softness.

"For 'Beeches'?"

She sat forward in her chair.

"I went down on Wednesday. The wood was lovely, such a carpet of leaves, but the house seemed *triste*. It wants us."

He was lighting his pipe, and he was silent for half a minute.

"I think I am ready to go back—if you are."

"I would go to-morrow."

"We shall have to get rid of this place. After all, we can't afford it. The fact is——"

She knelt down beside him and warmed her hands at the fire. It brought them nearer.

"We could let it to-morrow—ten times over. And then, you see, 'Beeches' belongs to us. I can do with one girl there and save you money. The garden is simply crying out for us. And we could have such jolly days in town. I always think London is most fascinating when you are not part of London."

His arm went across her shoulders.

"I'm fed up with London," he said; "it's full of vampires. Let's go back."

She was leaning against him now, her hair brushing his cheek.

"We'll have a wood fire down there each evening—logs, and watch the sparks. Steve, dear man——"

He hung his head.

"Kitty, I'm afraid we are going to be rather poor—for a time."

She put up her face and kissed him.

"I'm not afraid of that."

VI

WESTMACOTT walked down the slope from the station, went a little way along the main road, and took a turning to the left that crossed a stream by an old stone bridge. He was carrying a bag, and had refused to charter the solitary taxi that had been waiting outside the station office. Kitty had come down two days ago to put the house in order, and Stephen had remained in town to complete some business and to lunch with Mason. It was Kitty who had suggested the lunch.

As Westmacott crossed the stone bridge he seemed to become aware of another world. He saw before him a broad meadow over which a faint white mist was rising. Beyond the meadow, on the ridge of a hill, a wood of Scotch firs raised a black barrier against the fading sky, but between the massed trunks the sunset held flambeaux of fire. The moon hung behind him, and a flickering of stars began in the darkening and frosty sky. The world was very still; he heard nothing but the sound of his own footsteps, and yet this stillness was strangely alive. It had no sense of death or of loneliness, but a little shiver of secret life, mystery, wonder.

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Westmacott walked on with a feeling that something had happened to him. The road began to climb. It lost its boundary hedges and became a ribbon of pale sand between rust-brown braeken. It led him into the wood of firs, and here Westmacott faltered and stood still. He could not say what stopped him, or why he suddenly stood still with a feeling of lightness and of awe, as though something heavy and numbing had fallen from him. He looked up at the black masts of the trees and at the black spread of the branches overhead, and in the stillness of this wood he felt the presence of other things. He was alone, and yet not alone. He had become a part of something that was infinitely greater and more significant than himself.

The after-glow died away, and the moonlight took its place, and Westmacott walked on, looking at himself in retrospect and seeing things as they had been and not as he had fancied them. He was outside himself for the moment and above the events of yesterday. Thoughts came to him and hailed him like friends. "Mason's a good chap." And he remembered that he had called Mason a filthy hypocrite! "What was I after? Sensations? I suppose those women were sponging on me and thinking me a silly fool. And Eckstein! Good heavens!" He was conscious of an angry heat, a tremor of humiliation. How expressive that phrase. "I could have kicked myself."

He was at the top of the hill, and he saw a light shining between the trunks of the trees.

"She's there," he thought, and felt both glad and vaguely afraid. He slackened his pace, finding himself looking with inward eyes at Kitty, a Kitty who perplexed him a little and made him feel ill at ease with his most intimate self. People did not stand still; they were not gate-posts upon which the gate of life swung, yet let nothing through. He began to wonder what the last few months had meant to Kitty; what impressions had they left; what had they taught her. She had seemed so quiet. What had her quietness suggested? Had she been watching, resolving, willing, drawing him somewhere with the invisible threads of her being? Had she been drawing him towards this? He felt perplexed, deeply moved, vaguely resentful. His

egotism bridled at the idea of being watched, persuaded, shepherded, even by the affections of a woman, but that other thing that had met him in the firwood was—to-night—stronger than his egotism. He was carried towards the lights of home by a warm rush of tenderness.

He came to the beech wood, saw the great branches brushing the stars, and smelt the smell of dead leaves. He opened the gate and went up to the white-pillared porch. The door gave to him almost as he knocked.

She did not say anything. She put her arms round his neck and kissed him. Her lips were warm and infinitely clean. He returned her kiss with a deep thrill of emotion.

"I've walked," he said, with some of the shyness of a boy.

She was smiling, and there was some of his shyness in her smile. She closed the door, and he put his bag down on a chair.

Atmosphere! Yes, all that evening he was conscious of the house's atmosphere, the opening door, the soft arms and breath of a woman, the firelight, the daintiness of the rooms, the soft colours. There was nothing discordant here, nothing garish. They might not be rich, and it was possible that they were going to be very poor, but he saw and understood that there were things that mattered more than poverty.

They spent the evening before the fire, Westmacott in a little old arm-chair very low and comfortable, Kitty on a couple of cushions and resting against his knee. They watched the flames, and talked in a happy, desultory way, for there was more thought in their mood, the thought that sits with one and watches.

Nor did either of them betray the most secret and intimate of these thoughts. In Westmacott it was more a tendency, a flow of the emotions, than actual, concrete thinking. He was far less intuitive than Kitty, less clear of eye. He divined dimly what she saw.

For even in that happy atmosphere he was conscious of a shadow, something which would have to be fought, though he did not see clearly what that something was. His higher vision was still fragmental, momentary, a glimpse through clouds of the realities beyond.

But the woman saw. Even as she sat

there in the firelight with his arm across her shoulders she knew that the great test was yet to come. She had helped him to win the first fight; she had helped him to renounce materialism, but here in this quiet valley he would have to fight for the things that mattered.

What were they? Had he divined them?

She saw them so clearly—her love for him, his love for her, the humility and the patience of the artist, the work of each day done lovingly and well, the courage that persists, the simplicity that does not tire.

VII

FOR three months life went very well, and Kitty was beginning to wonder whether her man had not recovered that large and happy simplicity of soul that had been his before the war. He was working, and working hard, not only with his head but with his hands, but she still noticed an element of feverishness in his work, and this feverishness troubled her. He appeared to be slightly hurried, obsessed by the lust to accomplish, to finish, and even in his gardening there was a touch of the vain child, the passion for display.

"Why hurry—why rush at life? You cannot speed up Nature," that was what she longed to say to him.

But she was very shy of criticism, for the old happy self that seemed to have returned was still like a child that was learning to walk.

Yet his work had improved. It had lost the sensationalism, the meretricious cleverness, the sordid touches of six months ago, though in the eyes of the modern critic to be sordid is to be great. Stephen had taken an old theme that had been waiting for him all through the war, and had developed it into a sensitive and human picture of life; it was not great work, but it had a certain promise of greatness. She encouraged him; she praised, and there was love in her praise. She read the book chapter by chapter as he wrote it; she felt that it was her child as well as his.

Out of doors he had taken off his coat. "Beeches" was a delightful little refuge, an old house in an old setting, a house that had lodged farming folk many years ago and still retained some of the atmo-

sphere of a farm. They had three acres of ground, including the garden, a paddock, an orchard, and a belt of Scotch firs. The outbuildings of old red brick and timber were grouped round the yard behind the house, and here in the pre-war days Westmacott had had his carpenter's shop, his fruit-room, his wood-lodge, his tool-shed and stable. They had employed an odd man three days a week and had kept two maids, but times had changed. Stephen had set out to do all the outdoor work himself, and Kitty ran the house with that faithful soul Prudence Cross, who put sentiment and a home before high wages.

Westmacott worked hard; in fact, he worked too hard for a man who had led a flabby life for three years in the heat and sunshine. His restlessness, his passion for self-expression was still too strong, and instead of making him spend himself on people who were equally restless, it made him spend himself on things. And Nature is not to be hurried; she baffles the man who rushes at her like a fanatic; she plays tricks with him and will not be won. It is as though all the Nature spirits, the spirits of the trees, the flowers, the grasses, resent the too fierce meddlings of the self-driven man who is in a hurry. Puck and all his comrades become mischievous, spiteful, and unfriendly. Any wise old gardener could have warned Westmacott against forcing himself on Nature like a savage.

But he had not gained that wisdom. At the back of his mind and all his toilings was the passion for display.

He dug up half the paddock to enlarge the vegetable garden, and he dug—not as though he loved digging, but to be able to boast about how much he had turned up in a day. He made a rock garden, and strained and laboured with the heavy stones. Then came the idea of the pergola, a monstrous and grandiose tunnel of timber that was to stretch right across the paddock.

Kitty tried to dissuade him. He had begun to show signs of physical strain.

"Why not leave it till next year? We don't want to finish everything at once."

But he could not moderate the energy of his attack.

"We should lose a year's growth."

"But the wood, dear. Won't it cost—?"

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"Not a penny. Those firs want thinning in the plantation, and they'll make splendid posts."

She let him have his way, but it was during the felling of those trees and the building of the pergola that she began to get a glimpse of what was happening. This man of hers was in conflict with Nature, and when that happens it is the man who suffers. Nature was growing resentful and sullen; she was beginning to baffle and to tire him.

A single incident, vivid and significant, betrayed to her the beginnings of a chafed temper. She had come out to watch him at work; his back was turned, and he did not know that she was there. He was standing on a box, nailing a cross-bar to the top of two fir posts, and as often happens when a man is working in a hurry things went wrong. He was hammering the nail at one end, and the jarring of the blows made the other end of the bar move little by little till it slipped off the top of the other post, and the cross-bar fell, bending the nail that was driven half home. Westmacott straightened the nail and tried again. The bar fooled him a second time, and in falling struck him across the shin.

He lost his temper. He gave vent to one of those absurd bursts of rage that are ludicrous and pathetic. He jumped down from the box and struck the offending piece of wood again and again with his hammer.

He cursed it.

His child anger shocked the woman into pity. The mother-spirit in her wanted to run out and comfort him and to speak words of wisdom, but in pitying the child she remembered the man. She turned quickly and slipped back behind the garden hedge, knowing that it would not be good for him to be able to remember that he had been caught in a moment of such futile passion.

But the incident was a storm signal, and she set herself to try and slacken this fierce dispensal of energy.

"Steve, dear man, I don't want you to take the edge off your inspiration."

They were sitting by the fire, and he was jotting down some historical notes for his next book. He looked up at her with eyes that did not seem to focus her face.

"Why, how do you mean?"

"The garden comes second. You can spend yourself out there and in your books, too. Don't think I'm fussy."

He listened to her. He appeared to be struck by what she had said and to recognize the reasonableness of it. She had a stronger power of persuasion here, and she knew it, for he was keen on the book that he had just completed, and which was in Mason's hands. Only that morning they had received a letter from Mason in which he had accepted the book, and spoken of it enthusiastically.

"This is more like the old Westmacott. I congratulate you."

He put his notes aside and sat and frowned at the fire.

"Yes, that has got to be considered. After all, my real work—"

"People will want to read your books, Steve, and not to see our pergola."

He turned to her, smiling.

"What a wise woman it is. I tell you what, I'll allow myself so many hours a day in the garden, and you shall be time-keeper."

"I shall be very strict," she said, and kissed him.

She kept her word, and she would go out laughingly and call him in.

"Time's up."

"Wait a moment—just one more nail—"

"And one good sentence less. Come in, you dear old silly."

He followed her lead, and his work improved, but he confessed to her that he found his work more difficult than of old; things worried him, noises, letters, or the lack of letters; he was irritated by absurd trifles and had to fight himself in order to get away into the world of clairvoyance. He described it to her as though some silly part of himself was always opening the door and having to be pushed out again.

"I can't get away from myself—"

She was always confident, for she believed in suggestion.

"That's the war. You know there are hosts of men who are having just the same trouble, men who work with their heads and men who work with their hands. It's hardest of all for the writer. Go on steadily. It will all come back."

In fact, she believed that he would never have relapsed but for the failure of his latest novel, "The Flowering Vine." He

was extraordinarily confident about the book's success; he believed in it; Mason believed in it. Mason published the book in April; it was well advertised; they waited. There were reviews, a few, and mostly in provincial papers. One or two London reviewers were slightful scornful in half a dozen lines. The book was neither bad enough nor big enough to pique them; it had no pepper. But Westmacott was furious.

Adverse criticism hurt him; he was hurt still more by being ignored.

"I know. I'm taboo, because I was one of the fools who served in the war. Most of these superior people stayed at home. After all, they don't matter. The public matters."

He was very right and he was very wrong. The public has always been wiser than the critics, but the public did not read "The Flowering Vine." Perhaps the book was a little too precious and not sufficiently human, and Westmacott came back from a lunch with Mason, looking gloomy and resentful.

He talked it over with Kitty. Mason, it seemed, was not in the least depressed; he had advised Stephen to go on working steadily, to hold fast to his inspiration, and not to worry. "Dig in, and stick it," he had said.

Kitty agreed. There was no cause for panic. "Beeches" belonged to them, and she had two hundred a year of her own, and, as she pointed out to him, they could live quietly here, provide most of their own fuel and food, and wait till his pre-war popularity returned.

But he was in a difficult mood, sore, disappointed.

"It will be pretty dull for you, and I shall feel like a sponger."

She was tempted to give him a furious scolding.

"Don't be a dear old fool. You ought to know me better than that. We will dig in—as Mason says—and wait till the public surrenders."

"But—the humiliation," he said.

She knew what was the matter with him; he was pitying himself, and letting his spirit sink into that fatal self-absorption that is both cowardly and decadent. This was the greatest danger of all.

"Stephen, I am going to say something that may seem hard. Don't get into the way of pitying yourself."

He gave her a startled and resentful look.

"I am not pitying myself. I am thinking of you."

"Analyse that a little more carefully. Oh, my dear, surely the war ought to have taught men to take hard knocks!"

VIII

SPRING had come with its green growth and the singing of birds, yet Kitty Westmacott felt indefinitely sad. She was not happy because her man was not happy, and because life was an effort, full of little bitternesses, estrangements, silences. She had waited for him all those years of the war; she had kept herself chaste in a season of sexual laxity; she had counted so dearly on the years that were to come.

During the war she had been very lonely, and the return of the old comradeship had seemed to her to be the one thing worth living for.

And what of this comrade of hers?

She realized that he had lost his male chivalry, the sensitive and eager vanity that makes a man wish to shine in the eyes of a woman who is his mate. He was growing slovenly, a grumbler, nursing an eternal grievance, and using her as a vessel into which to pour the sour wine of discontent. There were times when she discovered something almost evil in his face, and it shocked her, made the very depths of her love quake with a horror of insecurity. His mouth and eyes were hardening. Morose moods alternated with hours of unmanly and wearisome complaining.

He worked harder than ever, but it was the labour of conflict, of disharmony. He came in from the garden fagged out and irritable. He did not trouble to change his clothes; he forgot all the little courtesies. Once or twice he growled at her, but his wife had an ardent spirit and a proud temper, and she flashed back at him. He sulked and avoided her for hours afterwards.

Sometimes she felt desperate, but she would not give in. She realized that anger and force words were useless, that patience and courage were her surest weapons. Some day he would wake up suddenly and shake the horror of self from him, and look at life with eyes of wonder and remorse. But when would it

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happen, and how! He needed a shock, some upheaval of the soul, but how would the shock come?

Yet the life was beginning to exhaust her, for her spirit was stronger than her body. She was working too hard in the house and trying to help him out of doors, and she had none of those hours of sweet relaxation when a happy woman lies in the sun of her good content. Life seemed full of wind and blowing sand, desert life, with none of the green tranquillity that her heart loved, and it seemed to her that her own face and her man's face were being worn and lined and ground down by this blowing sand.

Sometimes her woman's soul, starved, hungry for tenderness, cried out in her: "How long will it last? I can't bear it; I can't go on."

And Westmacott was blind. He blundered along in the dust-storm of his selfishness, eaten up with discontent, wearinesses, rages, bitter delusions. The idea that the arm-chair people of the literary world were conspiring to spite him because he had been a soldier became an obsession. He began to hate everybody, instead of hating his purblind self.

His obtuseness was really extraordinary, and yet, strangely enough, he was somehow aware of the hostility of their servant, Prudence Cross. This woman was devoted to Kitty; she was intelligent, she had eyes.

He remarked on Prudence's hostility; it was another grievance.

"What's the matter with the woman? Whenever I meet her she has a face like sour milk."

"Perhaps you annoy her, Stephen."

He laughed at the idea, maliciously; people of that class had no right to be sensitive or whimsical; they were just pack animals.

"She might keep a smiling face, anyway."

He did not see the look Kitty gave him.

"Do you smile at her ever?"

"No, hardly. But I can't stand a sulky face. We had better get rid of her."

"Stephen," she said, "you would not get another woman to do what Prudence does. I look on her as a friend."

"Oh, well, keep her," and he shrugged the affair aside, yet with the suggestion that his temperament was not being sufficiently considered.

About that time something happened, and the woman in Kitty nursed a secret. It was a new life and a new light, and she sat for hours considering it and wondering what effect this crisis would have upon her husband. The summer was slipping away, and she was growing more and more tired both in spirit and in body, and now she had this other ordeal before her and a peevish man to humour. How different it might have been! And yet, might not this new life and the wonder of it touch something in him, recover him from his slough of self-absorption? She decided to keep her secret for a while, to wait until the unobservant male in him noticed it. She was sleeping badly, and she made this an excuse for suggesting that she should sleep alone. "I'm so afraid of disturbing you, dear, that it makes me more restless." He looked surprised, but he made no objection; he was not sleeping too well himself.

About August Kitty took to breakfasting in bed, and on the very first morning that it happened Westmacott met Prudence on the stairs carrying up a tray. He had not been into his wife's room.

He was surprised, vaguely annoyed.

"What's this? Isn't Mrs. Westmacott coming down?"

The woman gave him a look in which scorn, and reproach, and astonishment were mingled.

"No, sir. Not till later."

"Why, what's the matter?"

"Mrs. Westmacott is not very well."

The idea of Kitty being ill annoyed him; he did not believe it. When Prudence was out of the way he went to his wife's room and stood at the bottom of the bed.

"What's the matter? Not quite the thing?"

"I'm tired," she said, "and I woke with a headache."

"Oh, is that all? I'm glad."

His over-clouded face cleared perceptibly. His selfishness had become so raw and touchy that it was ready to resent illness as an additional worry and expense. Kitty was eating her breakfast. Her face told him nothing. He did not realize that she was very lonely, and perhaps a little afraid, and that there are times when a woman yearns for the strong and comforting arms of her mate. Instead of sympathy, tenderness, he had

shown her a glum and irritated face. It was as though he had told her that a sick wife was a nuisance. His air of annoyance was not so crude in its anger as that; it was merely the unhappy expression of a complex of emotions that were buried deep under the crust of his egotism; they had stirred, moved, shaken the overlying crust. It was like the tremor of the earth, bringing a man to his feet with a feeling of insecurity and fear.

"I should stay in bed. You'll be all right to-morrow."

He assumed a cheerfulness that wished to impose itself on circumstances and upon her. Of course she would be all right to-morrow! He insisted upon it.

She asked him if he had had his breakfast.

"No; not yet."

"Go and get it, dear."

He went, and when he had gone she put the tray aside on the table beside the bed. She had not the heart to eat any more breakfast, and when Prudence came to fetch the tray she saw that her mistress had been weeping.

IX

THREE days later Westmacott found a letter from Mason on the breakfast table, and the contents of the letter put him in a rage. He rushed up to his wife's room and threw the letter on the bed.

"Read that!"

She flinched. His white face with its evil anger was like the face of a stranger.

"What is it?"

He stormed about the room.

"I'm hanged if I'll be dictated to by my publisher. Mason wants me to cut two whole chapters. Infernal impudence. I won't do it, I won't."

"Stephen," she said gently, "please!"

He stood still: he stared at her; she was reading the letter. It seemed to him that her face looked pinched and thin; it chilled him, not because he understood that she was in pain, but because her thin, strained face gave him the impression that she was critical and unsympathetic.

"It is a very reasonable letter."

She laid it on the bed.

"Reasonable! I had an idea that you would say that."

She made herself meet his eyes.

"Why?"

"You have always sided with Mason. You are not really interested in my work. You don't understand it——"

She grew very white.

"You think so? If you only knew——"

He had a feeling that he had spoken brutal and unpardonable words to her and it made him angrier.

"I'm going to have this out with Mason. I'm going up to see him."

She said nothing. She lay there white and passive, trying not to break down, to shudder, to betray her pain.

"Yes, sulk!" he thought, and flung out of the room.

She hid her face in the pillow and shivered so that the bed shook.

* * * * *

It was a serene September night when Westmacott walked home from the station. A full moon was shining and the whole world lay very still, so still that the sound of his own footsteps seemed to follow him up the road. Yet the eyes of Westmacott were blind. He had quarrelled with Mason; he had lost his temper and his dignity; he had drunk more than was good for him, and his blood was still hot and fierce. He did not see the moonlight on the grass, the sleeping shadows, the bracken like silver foam, the sweet serenity of this moonlit world in which he was a creature of foolishness and of discord. When he came to the wood of beeches even their slumbering and stately splendour was lost upon him. He saw nothing, not even that car drawn up under the shadow of a hedge some yards beyond the garden gate.

He let the gate bang behind him, and walked up the brick path to the white porch. He tried the door; it was locked. The locked door annoyed him; it seemed like an obstacle placed maliciously in the path of his anger. He knocked, and fidgeted like a restless dog.

A few seconds passed, and no one had come to open the door. His impatience flared.

"Hallo! Am I to stand here all night?"

He kicked the door, and his foot was still raised when it opened and showed him the figure of Prudence Cross. She held a candlestick in her left hand. Her face looked blanched, the eyes two circles of anger, fear.

"Mr. Westmacott——!"

She stood in his way; she did not move. He looked at her sullenly, a little foolishly.

"Didn't you hear me knock?"

Her voice answered him in a harsh whisper.

"The doctors are here. The mistress is ill."

She stood back and let him in, and for the moment it seemed to her that he had not grasped the meaning of what she had said. He hung up his hat, and his face was in the shadow.

"The doctors are here! What do you mean?"

"Dr. Heriot and his partner. The district nurse is here too."

His head and eyes moved slowly until they met the woman's. He did not understand.

"But what—an accident——?"

She shook her head, and he saw the flame of the candle quaking.

"Woman's trouble," she said in that harsh whisper; "it began soon after you left. She's very ill."

Westmacott's face flinched. He had become suddenly conscious of the shadow of some overwhelming disaster.

"Not dangerous?"

She nodded.

He turned and made for the stairs, and went striding up them, ignoring Prudence's frightened appeal. "Sir, you mustn't go. The doctors told me to tell you."

She started to go after him, but Westmacott had reached the door of his wife's room. He opened it, blundered in, and saw a sight he would never forget.

How long he stood there he did not know. He was dazed, aware of three startled faces looking at him. Then a man came from the bed, an angry man, and pushed him roughly out into the passage. He had closed the door, and he stood for a moment with Westmacott in the darkness.

"You musn't come in. Go downstairs."

Westmacott moistened his lips. He was shaking.

"Is she—is she in danger?"

"Good heavens! man, we have had the fright of our lives."

He opened the door, went in, and closed the door gently behind him, leaving Westmacott standing alone in the passage. At

first his shock was tinged with resentment. Why had that fellow pushed him out of his wife's room? He wanted her. And suddenly he wanted Kitty as he had never wanted her in his life. The passage was dark, but its darkness was as nothing to the blackness that enveloped him. He felt lonely, and there was anguish, terror in his loneliness.

He went downstairs. Prudence had disappeared, but she had left the candle burning on the hall table. Westmacott stood and stared at it. His face twitched; his lips were quivering.

He turned, caught hold of the stair-rail, and put one foot on the stairs.

"I must go to Kitty," was his inward cry, like the cry of a hurt child. "I must tell her; I'm frightened; she'll understand."

Then he withdrew his foot from the step. He bent over the rail, clutching it, his face blanched and distorted. He had realized that he could not go to her—that the woman who loved and understood him was shut away from him behind that door. She was with strangers. He was alone.

He choked; his head seemed to sink below his shoulders; he remained very still.

"Oh, my God, is she dying?"

He felt like a drowning man clinging to a piece of driftwood. Life surged over him; memories—the memories of the last year, the last morning. In a moment he saw all that he had not seen, felt what he had not felt. It overwhelmed him. He went down into hell, and from the darkness thereof he seemed to see a white and luminous face—the face of his dying wife.

Presently he straightened himself and seemed to twist like a man on a rope. He was in pain, acute, spiritual pain, and he began to wander about the lower part of the house. There was a light in the dining-room, but the light hurt him, and he left the dining-room and, crossing the hall, opened the door of the drawing-room. He realized that it was Kitty's room, and that it was in darkness. He sat down in a chair with his face in his hands, but that other darkness crept between his fingers and through his closed eyelids. A poignant curiosity attacked him. He wanted to see her room—the room where she had

spent so many hours while he was in the East—and he felt in his pocket for a matchbox. He struck a light and stood up, to find himself looking at her bureau in the corner by the window, with all its papers and trifles just as she had left it. The match burnt out, and that momentary glimpse of his wife's quiet corner dropped back into the darkness. He sat down again; he began to listen.

Kitty's bedroom was overhead, and he could hear a faint murmur of voices and the movement of feet. What was happening up there? What message would they bring him? Would it never be over? He sat stiff and very still, feeling that if he moved he would break down and cease to be a man. It was borne in upon him that it would be cowardly, disloyal of him to break down, but he felt a weight pressing his whole being towards the earth. How much longer?

Presently he heard a door open; someone was coming down the stairs. He rose and went quickly into the hall, and met Dr. Heriot at the foot of the stairs. Heriot was a square, dark, powerful man, but he looked dead tired.

"Come in here."

They entered the dining-room. Westmacott had not the courage to look into this other man's face.

"How is she?"

"A little better."

Westmacott gave a sort of a gasp.

"Thank God! But what is it?"

The doctor sat sideways on the table.

"Your wife is extremely ill—extremely. . . ."

He hesitated. He looked up and straight at Westmacott.

"Has your wife been worried? What I mean is—her vitality seems utterly gone. She's like a woman who is worn out—tired."

Westmacott stood with his face half turned away.

"I did not know—she was worried."

"She was not unhappy? Forgive me, but I have a duty to her."

Westmacott said nothing. He could not speak. His silence was a confession, the confession of a man who was blind no longer.

He stood trembling.

"Will she live?" was all he could ask.

Heriot rose from the table.

"I don't know," he said.

He turned towards the door, and Westmacott's eyes followed him like the eyes of a man whose soul is in hell.

"Can I see her?"

Heriot answered him very gently:

"Not yet. Not till I give you leave."

X

STEPHEN WESTMACOTT did not go to bed. Heriot's partner remained with Kitty for another hour, and the nurse was to stay with her all night. Heriot had promised to be with them early in the morning.

The moon was at its zenith, and Westmacott wandered out into the garden and looked up at his wife's window, which was faintly lit by the shaded lamp within; and this faint glow upon the curtains seemed to symbolize the frail light that burned in her tired body. Westmacott was calmer now, more master of himself, though his sense of loneliness was stronger than ever. He walked about the garden and the orchard, looking at the familiar trees and moonlit spaces, and they seemed to belong to some other shadowy world. He was conscious of this material life as something that had worn very thin, a shell that was dropping away, a mask that had become transparent and ceased to hide the features of a more mysterious and more real beauty. He felt all soul. He was out of his body. He used it, but it did not matter.

The fir trees in the little belt of woodland were asleep. He went in among them, and, sitting down in the bracken, looked inwards at his own thoughts.

He knew now that if Kitty died he would not want to live.

She was the only thing in the world that he loved.

His loneliness was a calm and silent anguish.

And then he began to marvel at his own blindness. It was all so clear to him now, and he was annoyed at the selfishness that had made him run to this woman who loved him and whine and complain like a spoilt child. How patient she had been! He understood that now, and in an agony he realized that she had been unhappy. He had had happiness waiting at his side and had not seen it. He had cried out and fought for silly, ephemeral things while the one



"You'll get well now, Kitty. I—I want you to get well"

great thing that mattered was slipping slowly out of his life.

Had he lost it?

He tried to pray. He was conscious now of mystery, of the imminence of Him whom we call God. Man was no mere machine. The physical part of him had become as air; the other part of him was vivid, convincing, immensely real. He knew that he would never be the same.

He had felt God.

Hours passed, and presently he returned to the house, and, taking off his shoes, crept up the stairs and stood listening outside her door.

He was afraid of that door.

How silent the house was! He longed to hear the sound of her voice, to be convinced that she was there, alive, breathing, thinking. He sat down with his back against the wall and listened. He sat there for an hour, patiently, perfectly still, and about three o'clock in the morning the nurse, coming out with a candle, found him there.

He looked at her; he did not speak. And the woman understood.

"She is asleep."

Westmacott nodded.

He watched the dawn come as a little gradual greyness that spread itself about him until he could see all the familiar surroundings: the white balustrades of the stairs, the oak press, the coloured prints on the walls, the handle and the panels of her door. All of this belonged to her; all the details had been planned by her, and he could remember helping to hang those prints upon the walls. It had been a wet June day, with the rain coming down heavy and straight upon the beeches, and he seemed to smell the wet woodlands. They had gone out in the evening, when the sunlight had broken through, and had walked together in the dripping, glistening woods. Would he ever walk with her there again?

A ray of sunlight slanted in at the window, and he got up and crept quietly downstairs. Someone was moving in the lower part of the house. He looked into the kitchen, and saw Prudence bending over the fire turning rashers of bacon in the pan. The smell reminded him of the war-cold, silent mornings. He realized somehow that Prudence had not

been to bed; she had been sitting up, watching.

She turned and glanced at him, and no longer was there any hostility in her eyes.

"She's still asleep, Prudence."

She smiled faintly.

"That's good. I'll have some breakfast ready for you in five minutes."

"Breakfast! I don't think I want anything to eat."

"Of course you must have breakfast," she said, as though speaking to a child. "You have got to eat—for her sake."

Westmacott said no more. He went and sat down in the dining-room and waited for her to bring the tea and food, and when Prudence brought it he ate and drank as though he were performing a duty. He was just finishing the meal when he heard Dr. Heriot's car in the lane, and he rushed out to meet him.

Heriot stared. It is possible that he had never seen a man so changed in a night, so haggard and yet so spiritualized, with a suggestion of greyness about the temples.

"I'm glad you have come. She has been sleeping, sleeping all night."

He was eager—trembling.

"That's good. I'll go up. I'm sending a trained nurse over to-day."

"Doctor, do you think I might see her? I'll do her good. I'll help."

"I'll tell you presently," said Heriot.

Westmacott walked up and down on the grass under Kitty's window while Heriot was in her room. He was listening for her voice, and he heard it; but somehow it did not sound like the voice of Kitty, for it was so toneless, so tired. He felt both exultant and frightened. He wanted to pour his strength into her like the sunlight in at the window.

A quarter of an hour passed. The subdued voices ceased; a door closed gently; there was a long pause, for Heriot was speaking to the nurse. Stephen entered the house and waited at the foot of the stairs.

The doctor came down slowly, and Westmacott waited for his face. What would it tell him? His first glimpse of it suggested perplexity.

"How is she?"

Heriot put his arm across Westmacott's shoulders and drew him into the dining-room.

THE THINGS THAT MATTER

"Better—and yet not better. There has been no recurrence of the bleeding, but she has hardly any pulse; she is not rallying."

He sat down in a chair by the window, but Westmacott remained standing. It seemed to fidget Heriot.

"Sit down, my dear chap. Do you mind if I smoke? I rushed an early breakfast."

Westmacott passed him a box of cigarettes and sat down in one of the arm-chairs by the fireplace.

"I want to have a talk with you."

"With me?"

The doctor did not look at Westmacott, but watched the smoke from his cigarette.

"I'm afraid your wife is going to die," he said.

Westmacott sat as still as death.

"The fact is—she is not helping us. It's almost as though she does not want to live. We can't do any more. You—might."

Their eyes met, and Westmacott's eyes fell.

"You mean—that if she thought—someone wanted her to live—and wanted it so badly—?"

"Exactly. Go up and see her."

"Now?"

"Yes. Make her feel—feel that life's good. Don't stay more than five minutes. I must be off now. I shall be in again about midday."

It would seem that Heriot had given some hint to the nurse, for when Westmacott went upstairs and knocked timidly at his wife's door the nurse came out and let him go in alone. He stood a moment looking at Kitty, a Kitty whose face had a strange, ethereal whiteness, a pallor that frightened him, and yet it seemed to him that she looked younger, more beautiful. He was reminded suddenly of that soft and unearthly beauty that is often seen on the faces of the dead.

And Westmacott wanted to weep, to break out into bitter lamentation. He had to grip his manhood as though he took his own vitals in his hand and twisted them until they ceased to yearn. He closed the door and went slowly to the bed. Her eyes looked up at him, she smiled slightly, but it seemed to him that her eyes did not change.

He bent down and kissed her, and had to stifle the choking of his throat and beat back the hot mist in his eyes.

"Dear, I never knew—"

She gave a little sigh. He sat down on the edge of the bed, aware of her restless hands wandering and fluttering over the coverlet.

"You'll get well now, Kitty. I—I want you to get well."

She did not answer him for a moment. He waited, one hand resting tenderly on the bed.

"I can't," she said in a strangely poignant voice. "I can't, Stephen. I'm too tired."

He did not move; he felt that his heart had stopped beating.

"Kitty, I— Won't you try to live? Oh, my dear, I can't—can't live alone."

One of her fluttering hands touched his.

"I'm so tired—so very tired."

And then Westmacott broke down. He fought and wrestled with his anguish, but it would not be stayed. It overwhelmed him. He put his head down on the coverlet and wept, and his heaving shoulders shook the bed.

"I can't—I can't live alone. I've been a blind beast, a selfish beast. And I'm being selfish now. I—I want to make it up to you. If you die—I could not bear the loneliness. Kitty, I'd follow you."

She raised her hand and laid it on his head.

"Poor Stephen. And I thought we should be so happy."

"We should have been happy—if I hadn't been such a confounded—selfish fool. I—I don't know what was the matter with me. It has all gone now; I've seen the things that matter."

And then he remembered his promise to Heriot. He looked blindly at his wrist-watch, bent down and kissed her, and his tears were on her face.

"I was to stay only five minutes."

He blundered towards the door, and the last glimpse she had of him was of a broken, helpless man who fumbled at the door handle and whose shoulders jerked up and down.

XI

STEPHEN WESTMACOTT had touched the depths of a man's remorse and humiliation. Even in his great loneliness he

wanted to be alone—to avoid his fellow-humans, to hide his horror of himself.

For it was a horror, horror at the appalling blindness and self-absorption, the cowardice and evil discontent that had brought this one woman in the world to such a pass.

She did not want to live!

Good heavens, what a confession!

He went out and wandered in the beech wood, and the rediscovered beauty of it was an added pain. What had he wanted, what had his snarling restlessness desired? A few paragraphs in the papers, letters from schoolgirls and sentimental women, to see his novels in the bookshop windows, to feel the sleek complacency of a "best seller." A little more money! And for such shallow satisfactions he had flung away the great things that mattered: the love of this woman, his joy in beauty, his delight in the satisfying simplicity of a craftsman's life. Materialism and his own vanity had fooled him.

He lay in the bracken and looked up through the branches of the trees. This beautiful September day, and his wife dying! He could not believe it, and yet he knew now that he had so starved her, wearied her, that she had not the strength to live.

"Stephen, I'm so tired."

He was dry-eyed now—face to face with the end of everything. If Kitty died, he would not wish to live. He would kill himself.

But would not that be the greater cowardice? Would he not be able to find some fine and more tender offering to her who had been his mate? Some book, written as she would have it written; some human document that might help other men who were blind with the same blindness? A hell of loneliness—but he would have to bear it.

Hours passed. He had conquered himself, but he felt again the wild hunger to be with her. He would not fail again; he would go in to her and be strong; she should know and feel everything before she died.

He went back to the house and saw Heriot's car in the lane. Was it mid-day already? He had not been conscious of the passing of the hours. He crossed the lane and went in at the garden gate, looking about him wistfully like a man

taking leave of happiness and of all the things that were dear to him. He heard voices, quite cheerful voices, somewhere; they hurt him.

He had reached the hall when he saw Heriot on the stairs. The man was smiling, and his smile struck Westmacott as something unreal and grotesque.

He stood and stared. He was aware of the doctor's hand on his shoulder.

"My dear chap—she is going to live."

"Is it true? Doctor, don't—"

"She told me so—and I think she knows."

XII

WHEN Westmacott entered his wife's room he saw instantly that she had changed. Her eyes were brighter and less shadowy, and her hands wandered no longer over the coverlet or plucked at the sheets. He fancied that there was a faint colour in her cheeks.

She stretched out a hand to him.

He closed the door and went quickly towards the bed. Kneeling down, he took her hand and kissed it, and then hid his face against the bedclothes.

"Dr. Heriot has told me. Oh, my dear, I have had my lesson."

"I'm stronger," she said, "much stronger. Do you really want me, Stephen? I had begun to wonder."

She touched his hair with her fingers.

He remained for some seconds with his head bent and his face hidden, very still and silent; but when he raised his face to her it was a new face, softened, enriched, re-inspired.

"Kitty," he said, "I can't get on without you. Do you know—when I thought I had lost you—I realized that you were the only thing in the world I loved. Even now I am selfish—but it is a different sort of selfishness. But—"

He looked at her almost timidly.

"Well?"

"When did you change your mind?"

She understood. She closed her eyes for a moment, but her face had a radiance, the serenity that follows the passing of great pain.

"When I saw your poor frightened face, dear man, and your shaking shoulders going out of the room."

Her eyes remained closed, and very gently and with awe he raised himself, bent down, and kissed her.

The Things That Matter

By WARWICK DEEPING

SHE had not seen him for three years. She waited for him at the barrier, a little woman, fragile, refined, sensitive, with the quiet brown eyes of one who listened better than she talked. She was wearing black furs, and her face seemed to float in the soft collar like a delicate flower upon dark water. She suggested fragrance, courage, a spirit of understanding that was as quick to respond with laughter or sighings as a pine-wood answers the wind, and yet—for all her air of fragility—there was a sturdiness about her that made grosser, duller women appear ineffectual and slow.

"Stephen!"

She waved a hand. In the thick of the outpouring crowd he was looking over people's heads and missing the woman who mattered. She had one vivid glance of his face before he saw her, a tanned and rather boyish face, alert, questing, with vivid blue eyes.

He was still in uniform. He looked the same and yet different. The difference puzzled her. She was conscious of a vague, momentary shock, an intuitive yet inexplicable sense of insecurity.

"Seven years," was her thought; "four years—my husband, three years a stranger. What is it?"

Next moment he had her by the hands.

"Kitty."

He kissed her. It was a lover's kiss and it thrilled her, and yet there was something in it that made her shrink a little, though the shrinking was inward and not obvious to him. That kiss made her think of a man who had been starved and deprived of all chances of self-expression, a man who had been let out of prison and who now rushed at life and clutched at it with over-eager hands.

"You haven't grown!" he said, laughing.

"Not even in grace!"

"Oh, I'll not argue that! Where are we going?"

"I have taken a room at the Talbot.

We go down to 'Beeches' to-morrow."

He paused, glanced round, signalled to the porter who had his kit, and then moved through the crowd, holding her arm.

"I say—this is good! I used to lie in my tent and think of all this—"

Glancing up she was aware of his restless, questioning eyes, and of his sensitive and dilated nostrils.

"Was it dull—the desert?"

"Dull! Sand, heat, and three or four middle-class gentlemen who had read nothing but the daily paper and their trade journals for the last ten years. Oh, help!"

"Well, you were able to write."

He smiled.

"That last book of mine didn't do so badly, though the ass of a censor cut it about. We are going to do big things; I'm stoked up like a furnace. Where's our taxi?"

They had to wait for a taxi, and she discovered the fact that waiting irritated him. She noticed an impatience that had not existed in the man-boy with whom she had lived so happily for those four years before the War. He stood still, throwing quick, impatient glances about the station yard.

"Good heavens! What's our fellow doing?"

Kitty was watching her husband's face. It had a restless, chafed expression, and somehow it made her think of a sensitive face beaten upon and worn by a perpetual stream of wind-blown sand.

A taxi arrived and they drove off to their hotel, and in the taxi he became the boy lover and husband she remembered. His face lost its fierce look, that air of straining after things that had been unobtainable on the desert.

"Little woman, I did not know you were quite so pretty!"

She let herself be drawn close.

"Am I?"

"Adorable."

"I am glad."

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The Things That Matter

She rested herself against him and smiled at London and its lights that were blotting out the gradual dusk. She felt the pressure of his arm; sometimes it trembled a little.

"He was tired," she thought; "perhaps it was that."

The rest of the evening was a complex of emotions, and the human part of it was so dominant, so vivid in its colours that Kitty Westmacott had no time to notice the subtler and more sensitive shades. She was a woman, and to this man of hers a thing of wonder, fragrance, mystery, and desire. She had expected a lover; she had prepared herself for a lover, fondly and exultantly; she had remembered all the feminine details—the new frock, the delicate lingerie, the faint perfume that was more a suggestion than a scent. The material part of her mattered; no woman of understanding forgets that, though it is but a beautiful sheath, a radiance surrounding that other and more sacred radiance.

They dined, and he looked at her and at nothing else. Later, she was astonished by his passion; it swept her away, engulfed her with a tenderness that was almost fierce.

In a while he fell asleep, but Kitty remained awake, for the woman in her had risen clear-eyed above the glowing mist of her emotions. She lay very still, feeling, thinking. She stretched out a tentative shy hand and touched him as he slept.

"Has the past come back, or is it a beginning, a beginning over again? Are you the same, dear man—I wonder?"

¶

IT was a spring day, very soft and still, and the windows of the white house looked across beds of wallflowers and tulips at the wood of old beech trees across the lane. The house and the garden were old, but not so very old; in fact, they were quite youthful in comparison with those venerable trees.

Beyond them rose a steepish hill covered with Scotch firs, heather, bracken and gorse, and when a wind blew these tall firs would be sailing against the blue, while the beech wood below was like still, green water in a cavern. Kitty loved both these woods, so different in their temperaments and in the moods they instigated, and in the old days Westmacott had loved them with her.

"But now——!"

She was sitting at her oak bureau in the corner of the little drawing-room, a favourite place of hers, for between the writing of her letters she could glance down into the garden or across the lane at the beech trees and dream for a minute. It had been her corner of dreams for the past three years, and here at this desk she had written her letters to a lonely, restive man somewhere between Port Said and Suez. Much of her inward self seemed hidden away in the pigeon-holes and the ivory-knobbed drawers of that old desk. She had begun to wonder whether her dreams were not to be put away in some recess.

Kitty paused in the middle of a letter and remained very still. Westmacott had come out into the garden, and she saw him standing by one of the beds of wallflowers and tulips and staring at the beech trees across the lane. She had a suspicion that he did not see those trees, nor was he aware of her at the window. He had his hands in his trousers pockets; he stooped; his eyes, hard and set, seemed to be looking at things a long way off. His whole figure suggested a rebellious listlessness, boredom. The man was not happy.

Then he turned and saw her face watching him through the open window, and he looked annoyed.

She ignored his look of annoyance. Her life was becoming a conscious effort to ignore certain things. She loved this man very dearly, so dearly that she could smile and hide her wounds, and he never suspected that there could be wounds. He may have thought her too conventional, too quietly cheerful. He wanted noise.

"I am going to the Tressiders' this afternoon," she said, "but I won't drag you there."

"I can't say that I am keen."

Her head was poised studiously.

"I was going to ask you to go up to Town for me."

"What for?"

"We want some things from the Stores." She paused. "And you could go to your club. Why not go to see that new piece at the Haymarket and tell me what it is like."

"I might," he said. "Do you mind?"

She smiled. She saw that he wanted to go.

Her curiosity was compassionate and anxious when she went into his study and glanced at the manuscript lying on his untidy desk. She bent over his chair and

looked at the half-finished page. Even the writing looked hurried restive, impatient. Half-way through a paragraph she came across a phrase that seemed to go straight to her heart—"This green death; this succulent, living grave."

"Oh, my dear," she thought, "is it as hard as that? And I had dreamed that you would love what my love had tried to create for you."

A woman's love is protective, and sometimes it is infinitely wise, and Kitty felt that she knew Stephen so much better than he knew himself. He had come back to her a passionate and undisciplined child, greedy for excitement, so full of strong animal life that older and more sensitive harness would not hold him. He was suffering from an enlarged egotism. It made him restless, drove him to desire abnormal self-expression, power, display. He had the vanity of a child. He had lost his sense of humour, his appreciation of all the more delicate and subtle shades of life.

"Perhaps it was bound to happen," she thought, looking at those quiet trees. "The War took men and threw them back a hundred years. He's just a blind, blundering, passionate boy."

She saw the tragic chances of the affair, but she set herself resolutely against accepting tragedy as inevitable. She knew that his work would suffer; it had suffered already. She knew that his love for her might suffer, or be replaced by something raw and transient. This man of hers had to be re-educated, gently, tenderly, with infinite motherly patience.

He came back late from Town, and she felt almost that he wished that she was asleep in bed. A woman who waits and who asks questions is such a complication!

"Had a good time?"

He lit a pipe. He was a curious mixture of reticence and restlessness. She knew how men had amused themselves during the War; she remembered those young faces straining towards physical self-expression—the life on the edge of death—and Westmacott was still like that, for he had been unable to spend himself in Egypt. She noticed that he was flushed, and jerky in his movements. She knew, too, discerning it as women discern things, that he would not tell her all that he had done and seen.

"Met Royds at the club. He's making three thousand a year."

"He might do. Does that pique you?"

"Why not?"

He did not look at her. The egoist in him was sufficiently sensitive to be vaguely aware of her hostility to Royds and Royds's philosophy, and her hostility annoyed him. She was always so much the angel in the path, a little woman with wise and waiting eyes.

"Why not make money? It gives one scope—elbow room. If Royds can do it——"

"Yes, Royds can do it."

"You mean I can't?"

"You are not Royds," she said.

His pipe had gone out, and he relit it as though he had a grievance against the pipe.

"Anyhow, he gave me some advice. I oughtn't to bury myself down here. I ought to get about—push, meet people. Everybody does it. You have got to advertise yourself. Royds told me that he doubled his sales when he began to push himself, and to give lectures and ask people to dinner. He has managed to work the films, and he has a play coming on."

"I see."

She sat very still.

"Is Royds married?"

"Rather. His wife——"

He hesitated and smothered some very obvious suggestion.

"Oh, yes, I remember," she said. "She was quite prominent during the War. But, Steve, I should like to ask you a question."

"Well?"

"Do you really believe that you can compete with a little self-advertising cad like Royds?"

He looked at her sulkily.

"I haven't had what I deserve. Why should I be crowded out by a lot of sensational cheap-jacks? I want a public, a big public, like the big men. If a man has to be a bit blatant—whose fault is it?"

"Every man's," she said, and, smiling at him, rose to go to bed.

It was an extravagant bit of business, but they took a furnished flat in town not very far from Baker Street, and left the white house except for occasional week-ends. Westmacott explained at the club: "My wife took it. Women are better at these things than men. Our little place in the country was too old-fashioned."

It was quite true that Kitty had taken the flat, and her acquiescence in a gayer sort of life had puzzled Westmacott for

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half an hour. The explanation seemed so obvious that he accepted it at once. Kitty was quite ready to live what he called the gayer sort of life.

"We ought to give a dinner—a christening dinner, you know."

"Whom shall I ask?"

"Oh, I want the Roydses, and Mason—my publisher. Royds has introduced me to Eckstein of the Universal Films. It would be policy to ask Eckstein—and one or two merry girls."

"Perhaps you will ask Eckstein?"

"Yes, I'd better."

"I don't think I know any girls——"

"There are the Bucks—the Bucks would do."

She looked at him with wide-open, intelligent eyes.

"You mean—they would suit Mr. Eckstein?"

He caught the inward sarcasm of the remark, though she had not meant to be sarcastic.

"Why, what's wrong with the Bucks? They are the new style, I know."

"I will ask them," she said.

And then she added: "Steve, dear, you know it is going to be rather expensive. I shall have to order a dinner in, and then, of course, there will be wine."

He answered her with the large air of a man of the world.

"Publicity, old girl. If we hook Eckstein—it will be worth it."

So the dinner was arranged, a dinner that was to be followed by many more dinners. Kitty went about it all with a sense of unreality and a feeling of spiritual nausea which she suppressed. She had seen the path before her and she meant to follow it; she did not argue or plead; she scarcely even hinted at her own other-worldliness. Yet, she was amazed. It seemed to her almost incredible that the romantic and rather unsophisticated boy of five years ago should be cheated by this materialism, let himself be inflamed by the cheap lust for notoriety and money.

And yet she could not, and did not, believe that the change in her husband was permanent. His old self was submerged, drugged. He was in a fever—the fever of living on his senses; the whole rhythm of life had been altered, speeded up. It was as though his heart beat twice as rapidly, and his brain was fed on overheated blood. That green valley in Surrey had bored him;

the tranquil breathing of its trees had been too slow for him. He had lost the inward vision. She wished to bring that inward vision back.

The Roydses were the first to arrive. Royds, a little hard-faced bantam of a man, following his large and flamboyant wife. They were assertive people; they had cultivated the art of being prominent in a crowd. Natalie Royds was what Kitty called a "poster figure," a thunderclap of colour, all cerise and naked bust. They patronized without meaning to patronize, flung commands at you like advertisements on a hoarding—"Use Boulter's Bath Salts!" "Congratulate you, Mrs. Westmacott," said Royds. "You have done the right thing for Westmacott."

"It is so good of you to say so. You don't believe in the country?"

She was as mild as milk—hiding all the sparkle of her irony.

"Your man needs a little puffing, you know."

His air of patronage both amused and annoyed her, but the Buck girls "blew in" and distracted her attention from this pretentious and worldly little clown. Westmacott came in with them; he was late, and had had trouble with his tie.

"Well, how goes it?"

"What a priceless little place you've got."

The Bucks were noisy, good-natured young women, hard as nails, colloquial, advertising much arm and leg. Mr. Mason arrived in the midst of the hubble-bubble they had created, a rather quiet man who hid a sensitive second-self behind an eye-glass and a stiff countenance. He looked at the Roydses and seemed puzzled, and Kitty liked him for that air of perplexity.

Mr. Eckstein kept them waiting. When he did arrive you realized the cleverness of the man who kept half the world guessing on his doorstep. He looked like a cake of white soap with two black buttons for eyes. He was the type of man whom Kitty pictured smoking an eternal cigar and smiling a vague and smearsy smile that meant everything and nothing.

She gained many impressions from that dinner—glimpses of people in the nakedness of their posing; the Buck girls chattered and flirted. Mrs. Royds maintained a perpetual recitative in her gushing contralto; Royds advertised himself; Mason looked polite and vaguely uncomfortable;

Eckstein ate and stared at Kitty. Westmacott talked a great deal—like a man who has stepped down from his dignity and is playing at being a shop-walker in his sleep. There was the faintest suggestion of obsequiousness in his attitude towards Eckstein.

Kitty could have cuffed him. The very stupidity of the business touched her—roused in her a little flame of pity, tenderness, humiliation, shame. The real inwardness of it became painfully obvious to her. She understood almost at once that Eckstein did not care a fig for Westmacott and his work, but that he might be interested in Westmacott's wife.

And she ignored Eckstein; he was the enemy—the symbol of all the things that were hateful to her fastidious and sensitive soul. She talked to Mason, divining behind that eye-glass and that quiet manner a wisdom that saw and understood.

About eleven o'clock they chartered two taxis and drove off to the Beyrout Club to dance. Westmacott had drunk more wine than a man should drink when he means to write clearly and naturally next morning. He danced a good deal with Mrs. Royds, while Royds and Mason took charge of the Buck girls. Kitty did not dance, neither did Mr. Eckstein.

He sat with her on one of the red plush settees, and Mason, catching a glimpse of them over Miss Rosita Buck's shoulder, was reminded of a thrush and a toad. Eckstein's double chin and mouth were exactly like a toad's.

Kitty felt his eyes appraising her. They were eyes that touched, fingered things.

"Ever been filmed, Mrs. Westmacott?"

"No," she said, "never."

He smiled. Snubs slid off his thick and soapy skin.

"You'd be a better proposition than your husband's books."

"They are not books that would film."

"I'm glad that you agree with me."

"No, they are too good to be filmed."

He gave her a sly, intimate look.

"You see, it's like this. We have half the novelists in the country throwing their books at us, leaving 'em on our doorstep. If Westmacott wants to be filmed——"

"He would have to write what you want?"

"Isn't that business? A woman like you understands business; look at Royds's wife——"

He glanced at the large surface of cerise

and white flesh that was Mrs. Royds. He smiled a peculiar, inward sort of smile; the soapiness of him seemed to grow wet and to glisten.

"There's a publicity agent for you!"

Kitty sat as though dreaming. She appeared to have forgotten Mr. Eckstein, nor did she hurry to remember him, and when she did remember him it was with a little, quick, ironical smile.

"I'm sorry. What were you saying?"

His black eyes glistened with spite, for she had managed to penetrate his skin.

Her last impression was of Mason standing beside her, too sensitive to put the thought that was in him into words. His face still wore that look of perplexity.

"Good night, Mrs. Westmacott. I hope you are not giving up that little place in Surrey?"

She looked him straight in the eyes.

"No. It's too rooted in the soil, you know."

"Good," he said. "They won't film you there."

¶

THERE are certain words that appear as dominant words at certain periods of a man's life, and for Westmacott the word of the moment was "expansion." He was always using it, talking of expanding here and expanding there, and he did not merely talk about it, he made almost fierce efforts to spread.

At first the life seemed to suit him. It was a whirl of activity, an eternal restlessness, a life that may cheat a man into believing that he is accomplishing great things. And Kitty backed her man. She had never believed in dogmatic literature, in moralizings, in sermons; she had the wisdom of restraint; she felt that this man of hers must re-educate himself. She believed that the day would come when he would discover that he was no better than a lost child.

She did not realize then how much she would have to suffer.

She did not realize that her courage and her strength might fail before this man of hers saw the light.

But there was one thing she could not, and would not, lie about—his work.

Westmacott had grown almost foolishly optimistic. He was vainer, more pleased with what he did, and he talked about

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it with an incessant eagerness. He still regarded her as his spiritual comrade—his secret public—his chief admirer, and he chattered to her like a boy. In the old days Kitty had read all his books in manuscript; he had always been a little restive under criticism; she felt that he would be far more so now.

Some time that summer he gave her his latest novel to read. She read it, and she was afraid. For two days she gave way to cowardice; she knew that he expected her praise, she could see it in his eyes.

Then—she knew. They had reached the first parting of the ways, the edge of the gap that might widen and widen. She had to make her choice, and she made it.

She told him the truth.

He lost his temper. His hurt vanity showed white and excited.

"I think it's the best thing I have ever done. Of course, it is not for prudes and conventionalists——"

"It is not—you," she said.

"But—what on earth is the matter with the book?"

She was very white and steady.

"Stephen, dear, I have always been very proud of your work—you know that, don't you? But this book isn't you. Don't publish it."

He stared.

"It has got to be published. We have been spending a lot. We shall want the money."

"I would rather scrape for six months," she said, "than see that book published."

"I tell you you are wrong. Hang it all, I ought to know. I'm not exactly an amateur——"

"Has Mason seen it?" she asked quietly.

"No, but he will see it—next month. And he will jump at it."

She said nothing.

But from that day Kitty noticed a perceptible change in his attitude towards her. The man part of him was still her husband, but the author part of him sulked and retired into its dignity. He never mentioned his work to her, and he did not guess how much this reticence hurt her.

About this time, too, she began to notice the arrival of those long, fat envelopes that the unsuccessful author knows so well. Stephen would come into the room in the morning, glance eagerly and rather anxiously at the letters on the breakfast table, and more than once she saw him slip one of

these envelopes into his pocket as though the sight of it annoyed him.

Once or twice he blurted out his grievances.

"I can't make that chap Eckstein out. He has had some of my books for months, and I can't get anything definite out of him."

"Why not drop Mr. Eckstein?"

"He may be jolly useful. Royds says that these cinema people are extraordinarily elusive; you have got to try and pin them down. It occurred to me that we might have a little week-end party down at 'Beeches.'"

Kitty looked at him quickly across the table. She had flushed up and her eyes were very bright.

"You mean the party to include Mr. Eckstein?"

"Of course." He thought how obtuse she was.

There was a moment's silence before Kitty answered him. He was quite unconscious of the struggle that was going on in her, of her emotion, her slightly hurried breathing.

"Stephen, I have done many things for you, but I won't have that man at 'Beeches.'"

He stared.

"Good heavens! Why not?"

But she would give no reasons. If he was so blind that he could not appreciate the delicacy of her fastidious and natural prejudices she would not try to explain.

"I simply refuse."

He was annoyed, puzzled.

"What's the matter with you?"

"There is nothing the matter with me."

"You don't like Eckstein? I know he's a bounder, and all that."

"His place is his office," she said, "please leave him there."

But she felt that the rift between them had widened, and when—about a week later—the Universal Film Company returned Westmacott's books with a rather casual letter from Mr. Eckstein, stating that they were unsuitable for filming, she was conscious of relief, and also of a sense of added irritation in her husband. In some way his disappointment seemed to assume her to be partly responsible. It was as though he thought that she might have done more. She felt angry, hurt, humiliated.

The next day she received a letter from Mr. Mason the publisher.

DEAR, MRS. WESTMACOTT,—May I call and see you some afternoon this week? There is a subject I wish to discuss with you, and I wish to discuss it as your husband's friend.—Yours sincerely,

JOHN MASON.

Kitty guessed what the subject was, Stephen's latest book. She wrote to Mr. Mason asking him to call on her on the Thursday afternoon. Stephen was going to Stoke Poges to play golf.

When Mason was shown into her little drawing-room she felt that she was in the presence of a friend.

He was a little nervous, but he lost his nervousness when she told him that she knew why he had come.

"It is about Stephen's work?"

He nodded.

"You have read that last book of his. What do you think of it?"

"What do *you* think of it?"

"It is all wrong."

"Does he know you think that?"

"Yes, I told him. I had to. He has lost his true inspiration, his sense of touch."

Mason had dropped his eye-glass, and he played with the black ribbon.

"What's the matter with him, Mrs. Westmacott?"

She made a little movement of the shoulders.

"He starved—mentally and emotionally—for three years. I think he came back in a fever to live. He has lost his sense of values."

"Why did you let him come to London? It is ruining his work. But, then, you know that."

"Mr. Mason," she said, "how would you deal with a restless, passionate, and grown-up child? Would you scold and preach? He was bored down there in the country, miserable, restive. He craved for excitement—notoriety—his distorted idea of fame. What was I to do? It seemed to me best to let him sow his wild oats—herd with his cheap people, play with the fire and be burnt with it. It was a hard choice for a woman to have to make, but I made it. I wanted him to rediscover life for himself. Was I wrong?"

Mason stared hard at the carpet.

"Has he learnt—anything—yet?"

"I can't say. I think not. But you know what proud, secretive creatures we are."

She saw that he was troubled.

"You feel that you cannot publish that book?"

He raised his eyes to her.

"Do you want it published, Mrs. Westmacott?"

"No," she said, "no."

Tea was brought in, and Kitty began to talk to him of other things—books, the latest plays, the spirit of restlessness, and the passion for display that possessed everybody, and the ultimate way back to cleaner and sounder living.

"I have an idea that it will do us all good to be poor. At present we are rather like the Gadarene swine."

"We shall be poor right enough," he said; "but the question is—has the country the patience and the grit to go through the mill? Personally, I think it has. And that leads me to something, Mrs. Westmacott. If this book is not published——?"

She understood him.

"The question of money. Thank you for having the courage to mention it. Of course, we shall be rather hard up."

"I might arrange to advance——"

"If you please, no. Don't you see what will happen? We shall have to give up this flat; we shall have to go back to the country and work. Oh, don't think me a disloyal beast for talking like this! It's because I love my husband, because I want to see him doing the work he ought to do. We used to be happy down there in the old days; we may be happy again in the future. But here! This cheap, over-stimulated, sensational life! It would kill the artist in him and disfigure me."

Mason's face had lost all its austerity.

"Mrs. Westmacott, some day he will wake up and bless you. And may I remind you that when the real book comes I shall treat it as something sacred, a part of you."

"I know you will," she said.

Westmacott had boasted a good deal about that book. He had been spending money freely, and Kitty had watched him become the centre of a little circle of parasites who found his ostentatious generosity seasonable and convenient. He was hunted, and flattered, and petted by a little pack of fluffy girls and women and one or two amorphous men. He had provided punts at Henley; he gave dinners, took "posies" of short-skirted young women to hotel dances and night-clubs. He paid. And in return he was given exclamatory cries of adulation, which cost the women nothing.

"Oh, Mr. Westmacott, how clever you are!"

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They pretended to dote upon his books, and he was persuaded into a lot of foolish trumpetings. He felt a dog, a great man, a dispenser of joy and of pleasant patronage which gave him a false sense of power.

A brown-paper parcel and a letter, waiting on the breakfast table, shook the foundations of this artificial world. Kitty, pretending to a blindness that was not blind, waited to see what would happen. Her compassion hid in ambush.

"Damn Mason! Insolent fool!"

She looked up and saw his furious yet slightly frightened face. For the moment he had completely lost control of himself; he was shaking; his face looked thin and harsh, almost evil.

"What is it?"

She shrank a little, seeing him as a stranger, a distorted travesty of the man she loved.

"That fool Mason won't publish the book. Good heavens! what an old woman! I always thought him a confounded hypocrite."

She remained white and still.

"What does he say?"

"Say! Read it. A lot of sanctimonious, humbugging tosh! Says he is thinking of my reputation more than his own. Filthy hypocrite!"

"Stephen!" she said.

He glanced at her furiously.

"I believe you are as bad as Mason."

She met his eyes and refused to let herself flinch.

"I told you what I thought of the book."

And then she rose and came round the table to him.

"Oh, my dear, do trust me, do try and believe—"

He pushed her hands aside, and flung up out of his chair.

"Rot! You are wrong—both of you. There are a dozen men who will jump at that book. We'll see."

Kitty had more than a suspicion that he was a little less confident than he seemed. John Mason's letter and the refusal of the book had been a shock to him, one of those shocks whose salutary action a vain man tries to conceal. Westmacott was in a mood that would not admit either error or the thought of defeat. For the next four weeks he showed an aggressive arrogance that was mere armour, and rather paste-board stuff at that.

Kitty behaved as though there was

nothing wrong with their world. Perhaps she was rather more cheerful than usual in a wisely gentle and unassertive way. There was no suggestion of superiority in her attitude towards her husband; love is a poor thing when it cries: "I told you so," and pulls the feathers from a mate's humiliation. She knew that there was humiliation at the bottom of the man's heart. He was self-absorbed, gloomy, reserved. She began to find him rather difficult to live with, but her tenderness was still all his, waiting for that moment when life would make him open his heart to her.

He said nothing about the fate of his book; he concealed his letters. He was employing a literary agent now—and she wondered with what success. He did not tell her.

But there were moments now when she felt that the sullen pride of him was breaking, though she did not think of the change as a breaking, but rather as a turning to her, a sudden revulsion towards the intimate sympathy of the past. Her love trembled a little, expectantly, longingly. She had begun to feel very lonely.

One evening he came home looking absolutely ill. The expression of his eyes had altered. He glanced at her with a mixture of furtiveness, pleading, misery that made her love for him cry out like a wounded thing. He was very near the breaking-point, and her generous spirit did not want to see him broken.

She said nothing till after dinner. It was winter now, and instead of going to his study he sat down with her before the fire. He was filling his pipe and staring fixedly at the flames.

"Steve," she said, "I'm getting terribly home-sick."

He glanced at her quickly, and then, making a spill from a piece of newspaper, he leant forward and kindled it at the fire. His tense face was lit up, but there was a softness upon it, an almost childish softness.

"For 'Beeches'?"

She sat forward in her chair.

"I went down on Wednesday. The wood was lovely, such a carpet of leaves, but the house seemed *triste*. It wants us."

He was lighting his pipe, and he was silent for half a minute.

"I think I am ready to go back—if you are."

"I would go to-morrow."

"We shall have to get rid of this place. After all, we can't afford it. The fact is——"

She knelt down beside him and warmed her hands at the fire. It brought them nearer.

"We could let it to-morrow—ten times over. And then, you see, 'Beeches' belongs to us. I can do with one girl there and save you money. The garden is simply crying out for us. And we could have such jolly days in town. I always think London is most fascinating when you are not part of London."

His arm went across her shoulders.

"I'm fed up with London," he said; "it's full of vampires. Let's go back."

She was leaning against him now, her hair brushing his cheek.

"We'll have a wood fire down there each evening—logs, and watch the sparks. Steve, dear man——"

He hung his head.

"Kitty, I'm afraid we are going to be rather poor—for a time."

She put up her face and kissed him.

"I'm not afraid of that."



WESTMACOTT walked down the slope from the station, went a little way along the main road, and took a turning to the left that crossed a stream by an old stone bridge. He was carrying a bag, and had refused to charter the solitary taxi that had been waiting outside the station office. Kitty had come down two days ago to put the house in order, and Stephen had remained in town to complete some business and to lunch with Mason. It was Kitty who had suggested the lunch.

As Westmacott crossed the stone bridge he seemed to become aware of another world. He saw before him a broad meadow over which a faint white mist was rising. Beyond the meadow, on the ridge of a hill, a wood of Scotch firs raised a black barrier against the fading sky, but between the massed trunks the sunset held flambeaux of fire. The moon hung behind him, and a flickering of stars began in the darkening and frosty sky. The world was very still; he heard nothing but the sound of his own footsteps, and yet this stillness was strangely alive. It had no sense of death or of loneliness, but a little shiver of secret life, mystery, wonder.

Westmacott walked on with a feeling

that something had happened to him. The road began to climb. It lost its boundary hedges and became a ribbon of pale sand between rust-brown bracken. It led him into the wood of firs, and here Westmacott faltered and stood still. He could not say what stopped him, or why he suddenly stood still with a feeling of lightness and of awe, as though something heavy and numbing had fallen from him. He looked up at the black masts of the trees and at the black spread of the branches overhead, and in the stillness of this wood he felt the presence of other things. He was alone, and yet not alone. He had become a part of something that was infinitely greater and more significant than himself.

The after-glow died away, and the moonlight took its place, and Westmacott walked on, looking at himself in retrospect and seeing things as they had been and not as he had fancied them. He was outside himself for the moment and above the events of yesterday. Thoughts came to him and hailed him like friends. "Mason's a good chap." And he remembered that he had called Mason a filthy hypocrite! "What was I after? Sensations? I suppose those women were sponging on me and thinking me a silly fool. And Eckstein! Good heavens!" He was conscious of an angry heat, a tremor of humiliation. How expressive that phrase. "I could have kicked myself."

He was at the top of the hill, and he saw a light shining between the trunks of the trees.

"She's there," he thought, and felt both glad and vaguely afraid. He slackened his pace, finding himself looking with inward eyes at Kitty, a Kitty who perplexed him a little and made him feel ill at ease with his most intimate self. People did not stand still; they were not gateposts upon which the gate of life swung, yet let nothing through. He began to wonder what the last few months had meant to Kitty; what impressions had they left; what had they taught her. She had seemed so quiet. What had her quietness suggested? Had she been watching, resolving, willing, drawing him somewhere with the invisible threads of her being? Had she been drawing him towards this? He felt perplexed, deeply moved, vaguely resentful. His egotism bridled at the idea of being watched, persuaded, shepherded, even by the affections of a woman, but that other thing that

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had met him in the fir wood was—to-night—stronger than his egotism. He was carried towards the lights of home by a warm rush of tenderness.

He came to the beech wood, saw the great branches brushing the stars, and smelt the smell of dead leaves. He opened the gate and went up to the white-pillared porch. The door gave to him almost as he knocked.

She did not say anything. She put her arms round his neck and kissed him. Her lips were warm and infinitely pure. He returned her kiss with a deep thrill of emotion.

"I've walked," he said, with some of the shyness of a boy.

She was smiling, and there was some of his shyness in her smile. She closed the door, and he put his bag down on a chair.

Atmosphere! Yes, all that evening he was conscious of the house's atmosphere, the opening door, the soft arms and breath of a woman, the firelight, the daintiness of the rooms, the soft colours. There was nothing discordant here, nothing garish. They might not be rich, and it was possible that they were going to be very poor, but he saw and understood that there were things that mattered more than poverty.

They spent the evening before the fire, Westmacott in a little old arm-chair very low and comfortable, Kitty on a couple of cushions and resting against his knee. They watched the flames, and talked in a happy, desultory way, for there was more thought in their mood, the thought that sits with one and watches.

Nor did either of them betray the most secret and intimate of these thoughts. In Westmacott it was more a tendency, a flow of the emotions, than actual, concrete thinking. He was far less intuitive than Kitty, less clear of eye. He divined dimly what he saw.

For even in that happy atmosphere he was conscious of a shadow, something which would have to be fought, though he did not see clearly what that something was. His higher vision was still fragmental, momentary, a glimpse through clouds of the realities beyond.

But the woman saw. Even as she sat there in the firelight with his arm across her shoulders she knew that the great test was yet to come. She had helped him to win the first fight; she had helped him to renounce materialism, but here in this quiet valley he

would have to fight for the things that mattered.

What were they? Had he divined them?

She saw them so clearly—her love for him, his love for her, the humility and the patience of the artist, the work of each day done lovingly and well, the courage that persists, the simplicity that does not tire.

For three months life went very well, and Kitty was beginning to wonder whether her man had not recovered that large and happy simplicity of soul that had been his in the old days. He was working, and working hard, not only with his head but with his hands, but she still noticed, an element of feverishness in his work, and this feverishness troubled her. He appeared to be slightly hurried, obsessed by the lust to accomplish, to finish, and even in his gardening there was a touch of the vain child, the passion for display.

"Why hurry—why rush at life? You cannot speed up Nature," that was what she longed to say to him.

But she was very shy of criticism, for the old happy self that seemed to have returned was still like a child that was learning to walk.

Yet his work had improved. It had lost the sensationalism, the meretricious cleverness, the sordid touches of six months ago, though in the eyes of the modern critic to be sordid is to be great. Stephen had taken an old theme that had been waiting for him all through his experiences, and had developed it into a sensitive and human picture of life; it was not great work, but it had a certain promise of greatness. She encouraged him; she praised, and there was love in her praise. She read the book chapter by chapter as he wrote it; she felt that it was her child as well as his.

Out of doors he had taken off his coat. "Beeches" was a delightful little refuge, an old house in an old setting, a house that had lodged farming folk many years ago and still retained some of the atmosphere of a farm. They had three acres of ground, including the garden, a paddock, an orchard, and a belt of Scotch firs. The outbuildings of old red brick and timber were grouped round the yard behind the house; and here in the pre-War days Westmacott had had his carpenter's shop, his fruit-room, his wood-lodge, his tool-shed and stable. They had employed an odd man three days a week and had kept two maids, but times had changed.

Stephen had set out to do all the outdoor work himself, and Kitty ran the house with that faithful soul Prudence Cross, who put sentiment and a home before high wages.

Westmacott worked hard; in fact, he worked too hard for a man who had led a flabby life for three years in the heat and sunshine. His restlessness, his passion for self-expression was still too strong, and instead of making him spend himself on people who were equally restless, it made him spend himself on things. And Nature is not to be hurried; she baffles the man who rushes at her like a fanatic; she plays tricks with him and will not be won. It is as though all the Nature spirits, the spirits of the trees, the flowers, the grasses, resent the too fierce meddlings of the self-driven man who is in a hurry. Puck and all his comrades become mischievous, spiteful, and unfriendly. Any wise old gardener could have warned Westmacott against forcing himself on Nature like a savage.

But he had not gained that wisdom. At the back of his mind and all his toiling was the passion for display.

He dug up half the paddock to enlarge the vegetable garden, and he dug—not as though he loved digging, but to be able to boast about how much he had turned up in a day. He made a rock garden, and strained and laboured with the heavy stone. Then came the idea of the pergola, a monstrous and grandiose tunnel of timber that was to stretch right across the paddock.

Kitty tried to dissuade him. He had begun to show signs of physical strain.

"Why not leave it till next year? We don't want to finish everything at once."

But he could not moderate the energy of his attack.

"We should lose a year's growth."

"But the wood, dear. Won't it cost—?"

"Not a penny. Those firs want thinning in the plantation, and they'll make splendid posts."

She let him have his way, but it was during the felling of those trees and the building of the pergola that she began to get a glimpse of what was happening. This man of hers was in conflict with Nature, and when that happens it is the man who suffers. Nature was growing resentful and sullen; she was beginning to baffle and to tire him.

A single incident, vivid and significant, betrayed to her the beginnings of a chafed temper. She had come out to watch him at work; his back was turned, and he did not know that she was there. He was standing on a box, nailing a cross-bar to the top of two fir posts, and as often happens when a man is working in a hurry things went wrong. He was hammering the nail at one end, and the jarring of the blows made the other end of the bar move little by little till it slipped off the top of the other post, and the cross-bar fell, bending the nail that was driven half home. Westmacott straightened the nail and tried again. The bar fooled him a second time, and in falling

struck him across the shin.

He lost his temper. He gave vent to one of those absurd bursts of rage that are ludicrous and pathetic. He jumped down from the box and struck the offending piece of wood again and again with his hammer.

He cursed it.

His child-anger shocked the woman into pity. The mother-spirit in her wanted to run out and comfort him and to speak words of wisdom, but in pitying the child she remembered the man. She turned quickly, and slipped back behind the garden hedge, knowing that it would not be good

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For Interesting
Announcement.

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for him to be able to remember that he had been caught in a moment of such futile passion.

But the incident was a storm signal, and she set herself to try and slacken this fierce dispensal of energy.

"Steve, dear man, I don't want you to take the edge off your inspiration."

They were sitting by the fire, and he was jotting down some historical notes for his next book. He looked up at her with eyes that did not seem to focus her face.

"Why, how do you mean?"

"The garden comes second. You can't spend yourself out there and in your books, too. Don't think I'm fussy."

He listened to her. He appeared to be struck by what she had said and to recognize the reasonableness of it. She had a stronger power of persuasion here, and she knew it, for he was keen on the book that he had just completed, and which was in Mason's hands. Only that morning they had received a letter from Mason in which he had accepted the book, and spoken of it enthusiastically.

"This is more like the old Westmacott. I congratulate you."

He put his notes aside and sat and frowned at the fire.

"Yes, that has got to be considered. After all, my real work——"

"People will want to read your books, Steve, and not to see our pergola."

He turned to her, smiling.

"What a wise woman it is. I tell you what, I'll allow myself so many hours a day in the garden, and you shall be time-keeper."

"I shall be very strict," she said, and kissed him.

She kept her word, and she would go out laughingly and call him in.

"Time's up."

"Wait a moment — just one more nail——"

"And one good sentence less. Come in, you dear old silly."

He followed her lead, and his work improved, but he confessed to her that he found his work more difficult than of old; things worried him, noises, letters, or the lack of letters; he was irritated by absurd trifles and had to fight himself in order to get away into the world of clairvoyance. He described it to her as though some silly part of himself was always opening the door and having to be pushed out again.

"I can't get away from myself——"

She was always confident, for she believed in suggestion.

"You know there are hosts of men who are having just the same trouble, men who work with their heads and men who work with their hands. It's hardest of all for the writer. Go on steadily. It will all come back."

In fact, she believed that he would never have relapsed but for the failure of his latest novel, "The Flowering Vine." He was extraordinarily confident about the book's success; he believed in it; Mason believed in it. Mason published the book in April; it was well advertised; they waited. There were reviews, a few and mostly in provincial papers. One or two London reviewers were slightly scornful in half a dozen lines. The book was neither bad enough nor big enough to pique them; it had no pepper. But Westmacott was furious.

Adverse criticism hurt him; he was hurt still more by being ignored.

"I know. I'm taboo, because I was one of the fools who served in the War. Some of these superior people stayed at home. After all, they don't matter. The public matters."

He was very right and he was very wrong. The public has always been wiser than the critics, but the public did not read "The Flowering Vine." Perhaps the book was a little too precious and not sufficiently human, and Westmacott came back from a lunch with Mason, looking gloomy and resentful.

He talked it over with Kitty. Mason, it seemed, was not in the least depressed; he had advised Stephen to go on working steadily, to hold fast to his inspiration and not to worry. "Dig in, and stick it," he had said.

Kitty agreed. There was no cause for panic. "Beeches" belonged to them, and she had two hundred a year of her own, and, as she pointed out to him, they could live quietly here, provide most of their own fuel and food, and wait till his pre-War popularity returned.

But he was in a difficult mood, sore disappointed.

"It will be pretty dull for you, and I shall feel like a sponger."

She was tempted to give him a furious scolding.

"Don't be a dear old fool. You ought to know me better than that. We will dig

in—as Mason says—and wait till the public surrenders.”

“But—the humiliation,” he said.

She knew what was the matter with him; he was pitying himself, and letting his spirit sink into that fatal self-absorption that is both cowardly and decadent. This was the greatest danger of all.

“Stephen, I am going to say something that may seem hard. Don’t get into the way of pitying yourself.”

He gave her a startled and resentful look.

“I am not pitying myself. I am thinking of you.”

“Think a little more. Oh, my dear, surely the War ought to have taught men to take hard knocks!”



SPRING had come with its green growth and the singing of birds, yet Kitty Westmacott felt indefinitely sad. She was not happy because her man was not happy, and because life was an effort, full of little bitternesses, estrangements, silences. She had waited for him all those years of the War; she had kept herself chaste in a season of sexual laxity; she had counted so dearly on the years that were to come.

She had been very lonely, and the return of the old comradeship had seemed to her to be the one thing worth living for.

And what of this comrade of hers?

She realized that he had lost his male chivalry, the sensitive and eager vanity that makes a man wish to shine in the eyes of a woman who is his mate. He was growing slovenly, a grumbler, nursing an eternal grievance, and using her as a vessel into which to pour the sour wine of discontent. There were times when she discovered something almost evil in his face, and it shocked her, made the very deeps of her love quake with a horror of insecurity. His mouth and eyes were hardening. Morose moods alternated with hours of unmanly and wearisome complaining.

He worked harder than ever, but it was the labour of disharmony. He came in from the garden fagged out and irritable. He did not trouble to change his clothes; he forgot all the little courtesies. Once or twice he growled at her, but his wife had an ardent spirit and a proud temper, and she flashed back at him. He sulked and avoided her for hours afterwards.

Sometimes she felt desperate, but she would not give in. She realized that anger and fierce words were useless, that patience and courage were her surest weapons. Some day he would wake up suddenly and shake the horror of self from him, and look at life with eyes of wonder and remorse. But when would it happen, and how? He needed a shock, some upheaval of the soul, but how would the shock come?

Yet the life was beginning to exhaust her, for her body was not so strong as her spirit. She was working too hard in the house and trying to help him out of doors, and she had none of those hours of sweet relaxation when a happy woman lies in the sun of her good content. Life seemed full of wind and blowing sand, desert life, with none of the green tranquility that her heart loved, and it seemed to her that her own face and her man’s face were being worn and lined and ground down by this blowing sand.

Sometimes her woman’s soul, starved, hungry for tenderness, cried out in her: “How long will it last? I can’t bear it; I can’t go on.”

And Westmacott was blind. He blundered along in the dust-storm of his selfishness, eaten up with discontent, weariness, rages, bitter delusions. The idea that the arm-chair people of the literary world were conspiring to spite him became an obsession. He began to hate everybody, instead of hating his purblind self.

His obtuseness was really extraordinary, and yet, strangely enough, he was somehow aware of the hostility of their servant, Prudence Cross. This woman was devoted to Kitty; she was intelligent, she had eyes.

He remarked on Prudence’s hostility; it was another grievance.

“What’s the matter with the woman? Whenever I meet her she has a face like sour milk.”

“Perhaps you annoy her, Stephen.”

He laughed at the idea, maliciously; people of that class had no right to be sensitive or whimsical; they were just pack animals.

“She might keep a smiling face, anyway.”

He did not see the look Kitty gave him.

“Do you smile at her ever?”

“No, hardly. But I can’t stand a sulky face. We had better get rid of her.”

“Stephen,” she said, “you would not get another woman to do what Prudence does. I look on her as a friend.”

“Oh, well, keep her,” and he shrugged

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the affair aside, yet with the suggestion that his temperament was not being sufficiently considered.

About that time something happened, and the woman in Kitty nursed a secret. It was a new life and a new light, and she sat for hours considering it and wondering what effect this crisis would have upon her husband. The summer was slipping away, and she was growing more and more tired both in spirit and in body, and now she had this other ordeal before her and a peevish man to humour. How different it might have been! And yet, might not this new life and the wonder of it touch something in him, recover him from his slough of self-absorption? She decided to keep her secret for a while, to wait until the unobservant male in him noticed it. She was sleeping badly, and she made this an excuse for suggesting that she should sleep alone. "I'm so afraid of disturbing you, dear, that it makes me more restless." He looked surprised, but he made no objection; he was not sleeping too well himself.

About August Kitty took to breakfasting in bed, and on the very first morning that it happened Westmacott met Prudence on the stairs carrying up a tray. He had not been into his wife's room.

He was surprised, vaguely annoyed.

"What's this? Isn't Mrs. Westmacott coming down?"

The woman gave him a look in which scorn, and reproach, and astonishment were mingled.

"No, sir. Not till later."

"Why, what's the matter?"

"Mrs. Westmacott is not very well."

The idea of Kitty being ill annoyed him; he did not believe it. When Prudence was out of the way he went to his wife's room and stood at the bottom of the bed.

"What's the matter? Not quite the thing?"

"I'm tired," she said, "and I woke with a headache."

"Oh, is that all? I'm glad."

His over-clouded face cleared perceptibly. His selfishness had become so raw and touchy that it was ready to resent illness as an additional worry and expense. Kitty was eating her breakfast. Her face told him nothing. He did not realize that she was very lonely, and perhaps a little afraid, and that there are times when a woman yearns for the strong and comforting arms of her mate. Instead of sympathy, tenderness, he

had shown her a glum and irritated face. It was as though he had told her that a sick wife was a nuisance. His air of annoyance was not so crude in its anger as that; it was merely the unhappy expression of a complex of emotions that were buried deep under the crust of his egotism; they had stirred, moved, shaken the overlying crust. It was like the tremor of the earth, bringing a man to his feet with a feeling of insecurity and fear.

"I should stay in bed. You'll be all right to-morrow."

He assumed a cheerfulness that wished to impose itself on circumstances and upon her. Of course she would be all right to-morrow! He insisted upon it.

She asked him if he had had his breakfast.

"No; not yet."

"Go and get it, dear."

He went, and when he had gone she put the tray aside on the table beside the bed. She had not the heart to eat any more breakfast, and when Prudence came to fetch the tray she saw that her mistress had been weeping.

Three days later Westmacott found a letter from Mason on the breakfast-table, and the contents of the letter put him in a rage. He rushed up to his wife's room and threw the letter on the bed.

"Read that!"

She flinched. His white face with its evil anger, was like the face of a stranger.

"What is it?"

He stormed about the room.

"I'm hanged if I'll be dictated to by my publisher. Mason wants me to cut two whole chapters. Infernal impudence. I won't do it, I won't."

"Stephen," she said gently, "please!"

He stood still; he stared at her; she was reading the letter. It seemed to him that her face looked pinched and thin; it chilled him, not because her thin, strained face gave him the impression that she was critical and unsympathetic.

"It is a very reasonable letter."

She laid it on the bed.

"Reasonable! I had an idea that you would say that."

She made herself meet his eyes.

"Why?"

"You have always sided with Mason. You are not really interested in my work. You don't understand it—"

She grew very white.

"You think so? If you only knew—"

He had a feeling that he had spoken brutal and unpardonable words to her and it made him angrier.

"I'm going to have this out with Mason. I'm going up to see him."

She said nothing. She lay there white and passive, trying not to break down, to shudder, to betray her pain.

"Yes, sulk!" he thought, and flung out of the room.

She hid her face in the pillow and shivered so that the bed shook.

Q

IT was a serene September night when Westmacott walked home from the station. A full moon was shining and the whole world lay very still, so still that the sound of his own footsteps seemed to follow him up the road. Yet the eyes of Westmacott were blind. He had quarrelled with Mason; he had lost his temper and his dignity; he had drunk more than was good for him, and his blood was still hot and fierce. He did not see the moonlight on the grass, the sleeping shadows, the bracken like silver foam, the sweet serenity of this moonlit world in which he was a creature of foolishness and of discord. When he came to the wood of beeches even their slumbering and stately splendour was lost upon him. He saw nothing, not even that car drawn up under the shadow of a hedge some yards beyond the garden gate.

He let the gate bang behind him, and walked up the brick path to the white porch. He tried the door; it was locked. The locked door annoyed him; it seemed like an obstacle placed maliciously in the path of his anger. He knocked, and fidgeted like a restless dog.

A few seconds passed, and no one had come to open the door. His impatience flared.

"Hallo! Am I to stand here all night?"

He kicked the door, and his foot was still raised when it opened and showed him the figure of Prudence Cross. She held a candlestick in her left hand. Her face looked blanched, the eyes two circles of anger, fear.

"Mr. Westmacott——!"

She stood in his way; she did not move. He looked at her sullenly, a little foolishly.

"Didn't you hear me knock?"

Her voice answered him in a harsh whisper.

"The doctors are here. The mistress is ill."

She stood back and let him in, and for the moment it seemed to her that he had not grasped the meaning of what she had said. He hung up his hat, and his face was in the shadow.

"The doctors are here? What do you mean?"

"Doctor Heriot and his partner. The district nurse is here, too."

His head and eyes moved slowly until they met the woman's. He did not understand.

"But what—an accident——?"

She shook her head, and he saw the flame of the candle quaking.

"Woman's trouble," she said in that harsh whisper; "it began soon after you left. She's very ill."

Westmacott's face flinched. He had become suddenly conscious of the shadow of some overwhelming disaster.

"Not dangerous?"

She nodded.

He turned and made for the stairs, and went striding up them, ignoring Prudence's frightened appeal. "Sir, you mustn't go. The doctors told me to tell you."

She started to go after him, but Westmacott had reached the door of his wife's room. He opened it, blundered in, and saw a sight he would never forget.

How long he stood there he did not know. He was dazed, aware of three startled faces looking at him. Then a man came from the bed, an angry man, and pushed him roughly out into the passage. He had closed the door, and he stood for a moment with Westmacott in the darkness.

"You mustn't come in. Go downstairs."

Westmacott moistened his lips. He was shaking.

"Is she—is she in danger?"

"Good heavens, man, we have had the fright of our lives!"

He opened the door, went in, and closed the door gently behind him, leaving Westmacott standing alone in the passage. At first his shock was tinged with resentment. Why had that fellow pushed him out of his wife's room? He wanted her. And suddenly he wanted Kitty as he had never wanted her in his life. The passage was dark, but its darkness was as nothing to the blackness that enveloped him. He felt lonely, and there was anguish, terror in his loneliness.

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He went downstairs. Prudence had disappeared, but she had left the candle burning on the hall table. Westmacott stood and stared at it. His face twitched; his lips were quivering.

He turned, caught hold of the stair-rail, and put one foot on the stairs.

"I must go to Kitty," was his inward cry, like the cry of a hurt child. "I must tell her; I'm frightened; she'll understand."

Then he withdrew his foot from the step. He bent over the rail, clutching it, his face blanched and distorted. He had realized that he could not go to her—that the woman who loved and understood him was shut away from him behind that door. She was with strangers. He was alone.

He choked; his head seemed to sink below his shoulders; he remained very still.

"Oh, my God, is she dying?"

He felt like a drowning man clinging to a piece of driftwood. Life surged over him; memories—the memories of the last year, the last morning. In a moment he saw all that he had not seen, felt what he had not felt. It overwhelmed him. He went down into hell, and from the darkness thereof he seemed to see a white and luminous face—the face of his dying wife.

Presently he straightened himself and seemed to twist like a man on a rope. He was in pain, acute, spiritual pain, and he began to wander about the lower part of the house. There was a light in the dining-room but the light hurt him, and he left the dining-room and, crossing the hall, opened the door of the drawing-room. He realized that it was in darkness. He sat down in a chair with his face in his hands, but that other darkness crept between his fingers and through his closed eyelids. A poignant curiosity attacked him. He wanted to see her room—the room where she had spent so many hours while he was in the East—and he felt in his pocket for a matchbox. He struck a light and stood up, to find himself looking at her bureau in the corner by the window, with all its papers and trifles just as she had left it. The match burnt out, and that momentary glimpse of his wife's quiet corner dropped back into the darkness. He sat down again; he began to listen.

Kitty's bedroom was overhead, and he could hear a faint murmur of voices and the movement of feet. What was happening

up there? What message would they bring him? Would it never be over? He sat stiff and very still, feeling that if he moved he would break down and cease to be a man. It was borne in upon him that it would be cowardly, disloyal of him to break down, but he felt a weight pressing his whole being towards the earth. How much longer?

Presently he heard a door open; someone was coming down the stairs. He rose and went quickly into the hall, and met Dr. Heriot at the foot of the stairs. Heriot was a square, dark, powerful man, but he looked dead tired.

"Come in here."

They entered the dining-room. Westmacott had not the courage to look into this other man's face.

"How is she?"

"A little better."

Westmacott gave a sort of gasp.

"Thank God! But what is it?"

The doctor sat sideways on the table.

"Your wife is extremely ill—extremely. . . ."

He hesitated. He looked up and straight at Westmacott.

"Has your wife been worried? What I mean is—her vitality seems utterly gone. She's like a woman who is worn out—tired."

Westmacott stood with his face half turned away.

"I did not know—she was worried."

"She was not unhappy? Forgive me, but I have a duty to her."

Westmacott said nothing. He could not speak. His silence was a confession, the confession of a man who was blind no longer.

He stood trembling.

"Will she live?" was all he could ask.

Heriot rose from the table.

"I don't know," he said.

He turned towards the door, and Westmacott's eyes followed him like the eyes of a man whose soul is in hell.

"Can I see her?"

Heriot answered him very gently:

"Not yet. Not till I give you leave."

Stephen Westmacott did not go to bed. Heriot's partner remained with Kitty for another hour, and the nurse was to stay with her all night. Heriot had promised to be with them early in the morning.

The moon was at its zenith, and Westmacott wandered out into the garden and looked up at his wife's window, which was

faintly lit by the shaded lamp within; and this faint glow upon the curtains seemed to symbolize the frail light that burned in her tired body. Westmacott was calmer now, more master of himself, though his sense of loneliness was stronger than ever. He walked about the garden and the orchard, looking at the familiar trees and moonlit spaces, and they seemed to belong to some other shadowy world. He was conscious of this material life as something that had worn very thin, a shell that was dropping away, a mask that had become transparent and ceased to hide the features of a more mysterious and more real beauty. He felt all soul. He was out of his body. He used it, but it did not matter.

The fir trees in the little belt of woodland were asleep. He went in among them, and, sitting down in the bracken, looked inwards at his own thoughts.

He knew now that if Kitty died he would not want to live.

She was the only thing in the world that he loved.

His loneliness was a calm and silent anguish.

And then he began to marvel at his own blindness. It was all so clear to him now, and he was annoyed at the selfishness that had made him run to this woman who loved him and whine and complain like a spoilt child. How patient she had been! He understood that now, and in an agony he realized that she had been unhappy. He had had happiness waiting at his side and had not seen it. He had cried out and fought for silly, ephemeral things while the one great thing that mattered was slipping slowly out of his life.

Had he lost it?

He tried to pray. He was conscious now of mystery, of the imminence of Him Whom we call God. Man was no mere machine. The physical part of him had become as air; the other part of him was vivid, convincing, immensely real. He knew that he would never be the same.

He had felt God.

Hours passed, and presently he returned to the house, and, taking off his shoes, crept up the stairs and stood listening outside her door.

He was afraid of that door.

How silent the house was! He longed to hear the sound of her voice, to be convinced that she was there, alive, breathing, thinking. He sat down with his back against

the wall and listened. He sat there for an hour, patiently, perfectly still, and about three o'clock in the morning the nurse, coming out with a candle, found him there.

He looked at her; he did not speak. And the woman understood.

"She is asleep."

Westmacott nodded.

He watched the dawn come as a little gradual greyness that spread itself about him until he could see all the familiar surroundings: the white balustrades of the stairs, the oak press, the coloured prints on the walls, the handle and the panels of her door. All of this belonged to her; all the details had been planned by her, and he could remember helping to hang those prints upon the walls. It had been a wet June day, with the rain coming down heavy and straight upon the beeches, and he seemed to smell the wet woodlands. They had gone out in the evening, when the sunlight had broken through, and had walked together in the dripping, glistening woods. Would he ever walk with her there again?

A ray of sunlight slanted in at the window, and he got up and crept quietly downstairs. Someone was moving in the lower part of the house. He looked into the kitchen, and saw Prudence bending over the fire, turning rashers of bacon in the pan. The smell reminded him of the War—cold, silent mornings. He realized somehow that Prudence had not been to bed; she had been sitting up, watching.

She turned and glanced at him, and no longer was there any hostility in her eyes.

"She's still asleep, Prudence."

She smiled faintly.

"That's good. I'll have some breakfast ready for you in five minutes."

"Breakfast! I don't think I want anything to eat."

"Of course you must have breakfast," she said, as though speaking to a child. "You have got to eat—for her sake."

Westmacott said no more. He went and sat down in the dining-room and waited for her to bring the tea and food, and when Prudence brought it he ate and drank as though he were performing a duty. He was just finishing the meal when he heard Dr. Heriot's car in the lane, and he rushed out to meet him.

Heriot stared. It is possible that he had never seen a man so changed in a night, so haggard and yet so spiritualized, with a suggestion of greyness about the temples.

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"I'm glad you have come. She has been sleeping, sleeping all night."

He was eager—trembling.

"That's good. I'll go up. I'm sending a trained nurse over to-day."

"Doctor, do you think I might see her? I'll do her good. I'll help."

"I'll tell you presently," said Heriot.

Westmacott walked up and down on the grass under Kitty's window while Heriot was in her room. He was listening for her voice, and he heard it; but somehow it did not sound like the voice of Kitty, for it was so toneless, so tired. He felt both exultant and frightened. He wanted to pour his strength into her like the sunlight in at the window.

A quarter of an hour passed. The subdued voices ceased; a door closed gently; there was a long pause, for Heriot was speaking to the nurse. Stephen entered the house and waited at the foot of the stairs.

The doctor came down slowly, and Westmacott waited for his face. What would it tell him? His first glimpse of it suggested perplexity.

"How is she?"

Heriot put his arm across Westmacott's shoulders and drew him into the dining-room.

"Better—and yet not better. There has been no recurrence of the bleeding, but she has hardly any pulse; she is not rallying."

He sat down in a chair by the window, but Westmacott remained standing. It seemed to fidget Heriot.

"Sit down, my dear chap. Do you mind if I smoke? I rushed an early breakfast."

Westmacott passed him a box of cigarettes and sat down in one of the armchairs by the fireplace.

"I want to have a talk with you."

"With me?"

The doctor did not look at Westmacott, but watched the smoke from his cigarette.

"I'm afraid your wife is going to die," he said.

Westmacott sat as still as death.

"The fact is—she is not helping us. It's almost as though she does not want to live. We can't do any more. You—might."

Their eyes met, and Westmacott's eyes fell.

"You mean—that if she thought—someone wanted her to live—and wanted it so badly——?"

"Exactly. Go up and see her."

"Now?"

"Yes. Make her feel—feel that life's good. Don't stay more than five minutes. I must be off now. I shall be in again about midday."

It would seem that Heriot had given some hint to the nurse, for when Westmacott went upstairs and knocked timidly at his wife's door the nurse came out and let him go in alone. He stood a moment looking at Kitty, a Kitty whose face had a strange, ethereal whiteness, a pallor that frightened him, and yet it seemed to him that she looked younger, more beautiful. He was reminded suddenly of that soft and unearthly beauty that is often seen on the faces of the dead.

And Westmacott wanted to weep, to break out into bitter lamentation. He had to grip his manhood as though he took his own vitals in his hand and twisted them until they ceased to yearn. He closed the door and went slowly to the bed. Her eyes looked up at him, she smiled slightly, but it seemed to him that her eyes did not change.

He bent down and kissed her, and had to stifle the choking of his throat and beat back the hot mist in his eyes.

"Dear, I never knew——"

She gave a little sigh. He sat down on the edge of the bed, aware of her restless hands wandering and fluttering over the coverlet.

"You'll get well now, Kitty. I—I want you to get well."

She did not answer him for a moment. He waited, one hand resting tenderly on the bed.

"I can't," she said in a strangely poignant voice. "I can't, Stephen. I'm too tired."

He did not move; he felt that his heart had stopped beating.

"Kitty, I—— Won't you try to live? Oh, my dear, I can't—can't live alone."

One of her fluttering hands touched his.

"I'm so tired—so very tired."

And then Westmacott broke down. He fought and wrestled with his anguish, but it would not be stayed. It overwhelmed him. He put his head down on the coverlet and wept, and his heaving shoulders shook the bed.

"I can't—I can't live alone. I've been a blind beast, a selfish beast. And I'm being selfish now. I—I want to make it up to you. If you die—I could not bear the loneliness. Kitty, I'd follow you."

She raised her hand and laid it on his head.

"Poor Stephen! And I thought we should be so happy."

"We should have been happy—if I hadn't been a such confounded—selfish fool. I—I don't know what was the matter with me. It has all gone now; I've seen the things that matter."

And then he remembered his promise to Heriot. He looked blindly at his wrist-watch, bent down and kissed her, and his tears were on her face.

"I was to stay only five minutes."

He blundered towards the door, and the last glimpse she had of him was of a broken, helpless man who fumbled blindly at the door handle and whose shoulders jerked up and down.

Stephen Westmacott had touched the depths of a man's remorse and humiliation. Even in his great loneliness he wanted to be alone—to avoid his fellow-humans, to hide his horror of himself.

For it was a horror, horror at the appalling blindness and self-absorption, the cowardice and evil discontent that had brought this one woman in the world to such a pass.

She did not want to live!

Good heavens, what a confession!

He went out and wandered in the beech wood, and the rediscovered beauty of it was an added pain. What had he wanted, what had his snarling restlessness desired? A few paragraphs in the papers, letters from schoolgirls and sentimental women, to see his novels in the bookshop windows, to feel the sleek complacency of a "best seller." A little more money! And for such shallow satisfactions he had flung away the great things that mattered: the love of this woman, his joy in beauty, his delight in the satisfying simplicity of a craftsman's life. Materialism and his own vanity had fooled him.

He lay in the bracken and looked up through the branches of the trees. This beautiful September day, and his wife dying! He could not believe it, and yet he knew now that he had so starved her, wearied her, that she had not the strength to live.

"Stephen, I'm so tired."

He was dry-eyed now—face to face with the end of everything. If Kitty died, he would not wish to live.

Hours passed. He had conquered himself, but he felt again the wild hunger to be with her. He would not fail again; he would go in to her and be strong; she should know

and feel everything before she died.

He went back to the house and saw Heriot's car in the lane. Was it midday already? He had not been conscious of the passing of the hours.

He crossed the lane and went in at the garden gate, looking about him wistfully like a man taking leave of happiness and of all the things that were dear to him. He heard voices, quite cheerful voices, somewhere; they hurt him.

He had reached the hall when he saw Heriot on the stairs. The man was smiling, and his smile struck Westmacott as something unreal and grotesque.

He stood and stared. He was aware of the doctor's hand on his shoulder.

"My dear chap—she is going to live."

"Is it true? Doctor, don't—"

"She told me so—and I think she knows."

When Westmacott entered his wife's room he saw instantly that she had changed. Her eyes were brighter and less shadowy, and her hands wandered no longer over the coverlet or plucked at the sheets.

She stretched out a hand to him.

He closed the door and went quickly towards the bed. Kneeling down, he took her hand and kissed it, and then hid his face against the bedclothes.

"Doctor Heriot has told me. Oh, my dear, I have had my lesson."

"I'm stronger," she said, "much stronger. Do you really want me, Stephen? I had begun to wonder."

She touched his hair with her fingers.

He remained for some seconds with his head bent and his face hidden, very still and silent; but when he raised his face to her it was a new face, softened, enriched, re-inspired.

"Kitty," he said, "I can't get on without you. Do you know—when I thought I had lost you—I realized that you were the only thing in the world I loved. Even now I am selfish—but it is a different sort of selfishness."

He looked at her almost timidly.

"Well?"

"When did you change your mind?"

She understood. She closed her eyes for a moment, but her face had a radiance, the serenity that follows the passing of great pain.

"When I saw your poor, frightened face, dear man, and your shaking shoulders going out of the room."

Her eyes remained closed, and very gently and with awe he raised himself, bent down, and kissed her.

England

By Warwick Deeping

"They spent the morning in a pilgrimage to the pool, and in a little while they were calling each other 'Joyce' and 'Peter.' Nature was in the conspiracy. They laughed, exchanged half-childish confidences, picked flowers . . . They had escaped for the moment from the thought of yesterday and to-morrow. They were beginning to get lost in the mystery of each other."



PETER MARLY emptied the teapot into the dry ditch on the edge of the fir wood, washed his cup and plate, tidied up inside and outside his little white tent, and sat down on a bundle of bracken to smoke his pipe.

It was a very exquisite landscape upon which he gazed, a green valley in Surrey, dwindling into the blue grey distance and overspread with the sunlight of a still evening in June. The trough of the valley showed the gleam of water, then came a few deep meadows, and above the meadows a wood of glorious beeches, and above the beeches a long slope of bracken, whortleberry and heather. Away on a far hillside an old man and a white horse were hoeing a field of turnips. Above the beech wood rose a pillar of blue smoke like the smoke of a burnt offering lit for some woodland god.

Marly drew a deep breath.

"England," he said, "oh, England!"

He had pitched his tent on Thornberry Hill, with the Scotch firs between him and the northern sky, and stretching right and left a sweep of sweet green turf edged with bracken and heather. He had been here two days; he hoped to stay another three. And in a week he would be on board the *Sidonia*, somewhere in the Bay of Biscay, on his return to the East. Marly hated the East. He had waited five years for these three months in England, and now

they were over. He felt desperately sad.

"Oh, damn," he said softly; "why was I such a fool?"

He sat there and thought of many things, a fair-haired and rather reticent young man, too sensitive and too much a lover of beauty to be the maker of money. He thought chiefly of his own loneliness and of that lonely little bungalow out East, of the life there and its associations, the smell of the blacks, the glare and the dust, the eternal "pegs" and the stodgy men at the "club." He thought of his Uncle Alan who was to marry a young wife. He too would like to marry a young wife and take some dear comrade back to that bungalow, but he could not afford it. Possibly, he would be as old as his uncle before he could afford it. Meanwhile, loneliness, self-suppression, and sometimes bitterness that was difficult to bear.

"It isn't right!" cried the youth in him, and another voice answered the cry: "If you had not played the fool six years ago you would not be going out alone on the *Sidonia* next week." Which was true; but the mordant sincerity of an accusing and inadvertent past does not help a man to be happy.

Marly watched the old man and the white horse hoeing turnips on that green hillside. He almost wished that he could stay in England and do that. It was a good life, simple, clean, natural, not so dull as it looked to the eyes of a townsman. The old man over there had a different set of conventions, that was all, and if you could only put off your conventions as you

By Warwick Deeping

change your clothes and slip into something simpler!

Yes—if! But what about the hypothetical girl? A ploughman was all very well, but a ploughman's wife? Things would not mix.

At that moment something bright and unexpected trespassed upon Marly's field of vision. He became aware of a girl in a cerise coloured jersey wheeling a bicycle up the sandy path from the beech wood. The bicycle was all hung about with packages; a green canvas bucket dangled from a handlebar, and the carrier over the back mudguard looked like a camel's hump.

"She's not going to camp here!" said the voice of his surprise.

But she was.

Half-way up the hill she paused to turn about and look at the summer landscape. She was rather a tall girl, slim, elfish, with dark hair. At the end of a minute she resumed her climb, saw Marly and his tent, stared at them almost resentfully, and diverged towards the right. She selected a spot about a hundred yards from Marly's tent, and, propping her bicycle against a fir tree, got to work.

Peter sat and watched her. It occurred to him that he ought to offer to help, but this dark girl seemed a capable young woman and no novice; he could tell that by the way she pitched her tiny "lawn" tent. Moreover, she had an air of being sufficient unto herself, she did not glance in his direction; she was whole-heartedly, absorbedly busy.

He saw her unpack an amazing "Tabloid" cooking apparatus, food, a Jaeger sleeping-bag, and what looked like a pair of pyjamas.

"Hang it," thought the man, "the thing's not big enough!"

She was setting up her spirit-stove and kettle when the boy arrived from the Chantry Farm. He had a basket in one hand and a bundle in the other.

"Here's your bed, miss."

"Oh, thanks, Jimmy. Did you bring any eggs?"

"Three, miss, and a bottle of milk."

He was an interested child and he dallied, with his hands in his pockets, and made conversation.

"It's better weather than when you was here last time."

"Yes, it is, Jimmy."

So she had been here before! Was she too a lover of this English valley, those mysterious distances, the green silence of the trees?

"Suppose you'll be wanting some water," said the boy.

"I filled the bucket on the way up—oh, bother!"

She had everything ready, but something seemed to be lacking, and she began to search among her belongings.

"How silly! I have forgotten the matches."

Marly had suspected it. He had suddenly decided that it would be pleasant to be able to speak to that dark-haired girl, and the opportunity seemed a happy one.

"I ain't got none. The gentleman has. I'll ask him."

Confound that boy! Marly had risen and was about to walk across to them, but the boy came charging over and officiously thieved the excuse.

"The lady's forgot her matches."

Marly produced a box.

"Ask her to keep these, with my compliments, will you?"

The boy raced back with them. She just turned and nodded her thanks, and went on with the preparing of her tea.

The sun set, dusk fell, and the stars came out, and Marly still sat there on his bundle of bracken. The girl had lit a little candle-lamp in her tent, and he could see the shadows of her on the canvas; she was making her bed. Marly found her a haunting and distracting shadow thrusting its soft movements in among the sadness of his thoughts. Why had she come here? Why could not life have left him alone? He sat there until it was dark before rolling himself in his

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blanket, but it was a long while before he fell asleep. A light breeze played in the fir boughs, and to the man it was like the sound of the girl's breathing.

Marly rose early and, after rolling up his bedding and looping up the "flies" of his tent, went down the hill to fill in his bucket at the spring. He had glanced at the girl's little white tent as though it were a thing of sealed and sacred mystery, but he had seen no sign of movement, no quivering of the canvas. Still thinking of her he loitered over the heather and under the beeches, alive to the beauty of this wild world and the cry of his own heart.

The spring was a spout of water pouring from an old iron pipe on the hillside above the farm. A great beech tree overshadowed it. The vivid grass was dappled with yellow sunlight, and the bracken on the hillside wet with dew. A great boulder lay here, and Peter sat down on it, his bucket dangling between his knees. How beautiful it all was! Why had he to go back to the dust and the oily glare of the East?

He had risen to fill his bucket, and behold—the girl was there, drifting towards him down the woodland path. Her hair hung loose about her shoulders, and her eyes seemed full of the shadows of the woods.

Marly stood staring. He saw that she was coming to fill her bucket.

"Good morning."

Marly went red.

"I'm filling my bucket. Supposing I fill yours?"

She gave it to him and watched the curving spout of water change from black to silver. He filled both buckets, and glanced at her with shy interest.

"I may as well carry them both."

She looked at him again, and into his eyes.

"If you like. Isn't it beautiful here?"

"Almost too beautiful," he answered.

Together they went up through the

woods, two young things in the spring of the year, a girl and a man, and both of them unhappy. They talked in a desultory and formal way, a little shy of each other, yet drawing perceptibly closer behind the emptiness of their words. It fell to the girl to break the conventional formalism of the affair.

"Why did you say that—just now?"

"What was it that I said?"

"Almost too beautiful."

"Well, when you are leaving it behind!"

"And are you leaving it?"

"Yes."

"For long?"

"Five years, perhaps."

"How queer," she said, "how very queer!"

They walked on again up the hill towards the redthroats and the blue-green tops of the Scotch firs. Marly had glanced momentarily at the girl's face, and to him there seemed to be a glimmer of yearning and of sadness in her eyes. She attracted him. Her sleek, mouse-black hair seemed to flow like water. She walked like a live thing, her head well set on its slender throat, her chin a little up-tilted, her mouth faintly smiling—troubled.

"Why queer?" he asked her.

"Did you come here for a last look at this England?"

"Yes."

"So did I."

"You?"

The coincidence broke down his reserve.

"What, are you going abroad?"

She nodded.

"And you don't want to go?"

Again she nodded.

"Is it for long?"

"I don't know. You see—it's to be married."

They were close to the firs of Thornberry, and she seemed to recoil with sudden wild shyness from this intimacy that had taken her unawares. Her eyes clouded. She gave Marly a half-amused smile, and held out her hand for the bucket.

By Warwick Deeping

"When two people start gossiping at seven o'clock in the morning—I have my breakfast to cook."

He gave her the bucket.

"What is it to be?"

"Oh, the usual English dish, eggs and bacon. It's so easy."

"Mine is the same. I have a bigish frying-pan; I might as well cook for both."

"Oh, don't bother. Besides, it's part of the game, doing things for yourself."

They drew away from each other, but between the two white tents youth had stretched an invisible thread of sympathy. They breakfasted; they washed up; they sat down and looked pensively at the landscape, this glorious green valley that had lured both of them to Thornberry Hill. Yet, in a little while, they were glancing surreptitiously at each other, that other human thing, the central figure in every landscape.

Marly was the first to make a move; it is the man's part to advance. He strolled across in his old white flannel trousers and Norfolk jacket, biting hard at the stem of his bull-dog pipe, his eyes shy but adventurous. The girl pretended to be unaware of his coming, but her eyes had taken a sidelong picture of him, his fair head, rather deep-set eyes, thoughtful face, and long easy stride.

"Do you mind if I smoke here?"

She turned quickly with a little flick of colour in her cheeks.

"No."

He sat down on the grass.

"Thank you. My name's Peter. Seems you ought to know."

"Peter. Why, that makes me think of Barrie! I'm Joyce."

"It's a good name," he said.

And then they laughed, and immediately became two irresponsible young people. Here was England in June, woods, heather, and bracken, blue sky, white clouds sailing, water a-gleam in the valley deeps, meadows mysterious with flowers and grass. It was their day, youth's day; why

should they not take it? The same thought was in the hearts of both.

"Do you know the Buck's Pool?" asked the man.

"No. Where is it?"

He pointed with the stem of his pipe.

"There, down the valley. It's gorgeous. You go down into the stillest place in the whole world. Beech woods like mountains all round it, and just the splash of a fish or the note of a bird."

"Let's go," she said.

"Will you?"

He looked at her with a delighted wonder, and she liked his eyes, they were so clear.

They spent the morning in a pilgrimage to the pool, and in a little while they were calling each other "Joyce" and "Peter." Nature was in the conspiracy. They laughed, exchanged half-childish confidences, picked flowers, stood with wide open eyes and watched a squirrel dodging up a tree, imagined strange shapes and figures in the deep green glooms of the woodland ways, listened to the sound of some bird singing. They had escaped for the moment from the thought of yesterday and to-morrow. They were beginning to get lost in the mystery of each other.

For an hour or more they sat by the Buck's Pool and watched the still water.

They had less to say to each other on the way home to Thornberry Hill. "Yesterday" and "to-morrow" had returned, and dominated their thoughts so powerfully that they were loth to talk. The morning had been irresponsible and happy, but now they felt lonely, perhaps the more lonely for being together.

Peter hesitated half-way between the two tents.

"Doing anything this afternoon?"

She understood his casual air. It was protective, diffident.

"No. I might go to sleep, and I might not."

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"You wouldn't walk up to Fern Hill? You could go to sleep there! I'd watch like a faithful dog."

"I might," she said.

They went.

Lying there in the bracken under the blue of the sky they felt strangely near to each other on the summit of that lofty tranquil hill. They began to talk of all manner of simple yet intimate things, and with all the intense seriousness of youth. It was the man who first gave these confessions a personal note. He lay on his back and stared at the sky.

"So, you see, in my case it all comes of not knowing anything about the value of money. My people never dinned it into me that in these days you cannot get what you want or be what you want without money."

She was biting a blade of grass, and she nodded.

"It's horribly true. And for money you have to do things that you hate."

"I do things that I hate, and I don't get the money! I slacked at school and at college; I didn't realize that work meant a grip on the future. And then the poor old dad got fed up and packed me off East. I don't blame him."

"Wasn't there anything for you to do in England?"

"There might have been. My uncle would have taken me on, but I suppose he thought that I needed a lesson. So I was shipped out to my mater's brother. My English uncle has a big estate down west. A week ago I wrote and asked him if he could give me a chance as his agent. He said he would think it over and let me know, but he hasn't written since. I've got some pride; I shan't ask him again."

"Sometimes one has to swallow things," she said.

There was silence for a minute. Marly was watching a hawk hovering in the blue, and the bird seemed to suggest some thought to him, for he turned on his side and looked at Joyce.

"I say—you won't think me an impertinent cad—but do you want to be married?"

She hung her head.

"You oughtn't to ask that."

"I know. But everything seems different to-day. I've told you about myself."

She pulled up a bracken frond and began to twist it into a knot.

"No, I don't," she said a little defiantly.

"But why?"

"He's twenty years older than I am, and there are some men who grow old quickly. He's kind and fat, and his waistcoat stands out, and he has one of those ginger-grey moustaches. Oh, how beastly of me!"

Peter sat up.

"Good heavens, why are you doing it?"

"Well, you see, we are poor mother and three girls. I'm the eldest. He was a friend of father's, and he has been very good to us, and when he came over to England last time he wanted to marry. He wanted me. And I thought that if I refused—"

Peter was at white heat now.

"But why should you sacrifice yourself? Can't the other girls go out and work? It's wrong—it's utterly and damnably wrong."

"But life seems to be like that. I am keeping my promise. I'm sailing next week on the *Sidonia*."

Marly's head went up.

"The *Sidonia*? So am I."

"You?"

"Yes. My uncle out there is getting married. He—"

And then a sudden silence fell upon them. They sat and looked at each other with eyes that glimpsed the disastrous coincidence.

Marly leant forward.

"You are not going to Patanagore?"

She nodded.

"I am."

They looked frightened.

"His name's Pascoe?"

"Yes. Alan Pascoe."

"Good God, it's my uncle!"

He sprang up, and going a little way off, stood looking over the sea of bracken towards the blue of the distant hills. His figure had grown rigid, stiffening itself against some emotional shock, for the youth in him was in wild revolt. How well she had described Mr. Alan Pascoe, that kind, complacent, pawky, ginger-headed bachelor who should have married a wife twenty years ago. But now! And Joyce! It was unthinkable!

Raging, he turned back to her. But when he saw her face all the fire and the passion went out of him. She was sitting in the bracken with her hands hanging limply over her knees, her eyes full of a vacant hopelessness. She was white now, white and tired, like a girl who has been desperately ill, and who has fled into the country in quest of fresh, red blood.

"You can't," he began.

She looked up at him pitifully.

"Why did I meet you here?"

"Fate meant to stop you."

"Don't," she said, "please don't make it harder for me. It's not easy, I can assure you."

Marly's mouth quivered. He became possessed by an understanding tenderness, a chivalry that could refrain.

"I'm sorry. Please forgive me."

He sat down, his hands clasped over his bent knees. He did not look at Joyce for he knew that she did not wish to be stared at.

"Uncle Alan is not a bad sort. The bungalow is quite decent, and there's a garden——"

"Please," she said. "I don't want to talk about it."

He accepted her ruling, and found himself picking up the outline of Thornberry Hill. It was a pretty extraordinary coincidence that they should have met under those Scotch firs, and that they should have been brought to that wild spot by the same longing to spend a last few days in these English woodlands. Those two little white tents looked

like headstones erected to the memory of two young lives. Marly's face seemed to grow more clear-cut and resolute. He frowned a little over the decision that he reached, but this decision was not the product of mere impulse.

"Of course, this settles it," he said to her presently; "I shan't go back to Patanagore."

"Not go back!"

"Well, wouldn't it be rather impossible? I shall try and get something to do over here. As it is, I have no right to interfere; I'm not in a position to ask a woman to marry me."

"No," she said dully; "no."

"But if I were——"

She understood.

During the next two days, a very great gentleness characterized Marly's attitude towards this solitary girl. They spent many hours together wandering through the green English ways, comrades in self-suppression, lovers who could not love. Youth is crude and selfish until it has been taught by suffering; Marly had suffered, and suffering had given him understanding. He knew that Joyce was sick at heart, and that she had so little surplus strength to carry her through the coming ordeal that he had no right to make the burden heavier.

There were times when he hated Alan Pascoe, yet even that commonplace and obese figure was not without pathos. Perhaps Pascoe had been lonely for twenty years? Perhaps circumstances had baulked him in his youth? And yet—why should Joyce be sacrificed to compensate middle age for twenty years of loneliness?

But Marly remained firm in his determination not to return.

"It would be impossible," he told himself; "it might mean torment for us all."

They spent their last evening together under the beeches of the Buck's Pool. Joyce was going home to her London suburb on the morrow, to pack her boxes and to say

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"good-bye." They sat side by side, but a little apart, gently sad, talking in quiet voices.

"You owe me something, after all," she said, "for you are staying in England."

"And you have got nothing!"

"But I have! A memory. I suppose there are times when one has to live on memories."

He reached for one of her hands, and she let him hold it.

"And dream dreams! Supposing the impossible happened? Supposing I found a job and came to you and said, 'Stay.'"

She smiled at him sadly.

"Don't let us dream. It hurts too much to wake up out of a dream."

"But would you stay?"

She nodded.

They parted next morning, a cart from the farm carrying Joyce's camping outfit to Shere Station; Marly riding off on his motor-bike and side-car that had been left at the farm.

Joyce joined the "family" at Ealing, and spent most of the evening alone, putting her things together. The "family" thought her silent, even dreary; those three or four days in the country appeared to have done her more harm than good.

She was sailing on Thursday, and the thought of it hurt her heart.

Peter Marly had returned to his aunt's at Windsor. The next three days promised to be days of gloom. He almost wished that the *Sidonia* had sailed, and that Joyce was beyond recall. There were moments when he felt that he must rush off and see her once more.

It was on the Wednesday evening that he received that letter from his uncle in Devon.

"DEAR PETER,—I have decided that it is possible for me to take you here. Symonds is getting old, and wishes to retire. He is willing to stay on for a year to coach you in the management of the estate. To begin with, I can offer you four hundred

a year and a cottage. Come down and see me. This letter should reach you before you sail. Yours affectionately.—JOHN MARLY."

Marly hardly slept that night. His morning dash to town was a headlong adventure. He had decided to go straight to the boat. The *Sidonia* was sailing from Tilbury, and he did not reach the docks till ten.

In a panic lest he should miss Joyce, he found the *Sidonia* lying huge and black, with her white upper-works gleaming above the quay. People got in his way. Piles of luggage lay about, and for a while he was rather like a lost dog in a crowd.

He accosted nearly every sailorman he met.

"Excuse me—I'm looking for Miss Joyce Harkness. A girl with dark hair."

They looked at his flushed face and anxious eyes, and some were amused at his eager helplessness. One snappy little steward, who had an alcoholic liver, turned on him ironically. "Got a photo of her, have you? We've three hundred odd women on this ship!"

But he found her at last. She was leaning over the rail of the boat-deck and looking with eyes of vacant longing at the dull Essex flats.

"Joyce."

She turned quickly. He saw her go red, and then very pale. She was afraid.

"You are coming?"

"No. I've got that job with my uncle in Devon. Four hundred a year and a cottage. It's not very much. Will you stay?"

For a moment she looked bewildered.

"But my luggage—and him?"

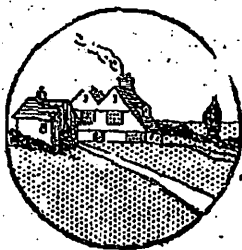
Marly caught her hands.

"I'll chuck everything—unless you stay."

She burst into tears.

"I'll stay," she said.

WARWICK DEERING.



"PLUNDER"

By WARWICK DEEPING



GILBERT FLODDEN had a cottage in the country. He wrote books—dreamy and exquisite books which nobody read; he gardened; he was content. The little money that he earned sufficed him. He was an artist, and quite happy with his art.

In the month of June Rachel Gwent came to stay at Rust Hall. She had read some of Flodden's books and admired them; and it was she who persuaded her hostess—Mrs. Cornbury—to call on the author. They found him scything grass in his orchard, collarless and hatless, and dressed in an old khaki shirt and white flannel trousers; but Flodden had looks, a touch of romance.

"Dear me," said Mrs. Cornbury, who was immensely mistrustful of clever people, "so you live the simple life, Mr. Flodden?"

The author smiled—and Rachel was attracted by his smile; it was so elvish, so mystical.

"It helps," he said; "I like life to have the dew on it, you know."

He insisted on giving them tea; and since he kept no regular servant, he made tea himself and served it; nor did his dignity suffer. The man had no pose; he was extraordinarily natural.

Rachel Gwent—dark, modern, a little ecstatic, accustomed to young men who called everything "priceless"—fell under the fascination of Flodden's unusual naturalness. She loved his books—and she was able to remember the titles of two of them. And in the course of that half an hour something very serious happened to Gilbert Flodden. He fell in love with this very charming daughter of Philistia.

"What an extraordinary person!"

Such was Mrs. Cornbury's criticism of the author.

"Pigging there all by himself. A tinned-meat life!"

And Rachel laughed. She had it on the tip of her tongue to say that eaters of tinned food ought to be encouraged, seeing that the Cornbury brand of "bully beef" was so popular, but she refrained.

Cassell's
Dec 1921

The Cornburys apparently had no sense of humour. John Cornbury had taken to himself a crest; it appeared on his note-paper and his carriage—a horse's head, and beneath it the motto: "I can." People said that such superhuman sincerity should have been chronicled in the pages of *Punch*.

But youth is serious—youth flames, and it was the month of June. It had been Rachel's fate to have many lovers of the modern sort, dilettante devotees and dancing partners—young men who conveyed the fury of their passion by calling her "Old Thing"—but never had she had a lover like Gilbert Flodden. He revealed himself and life to her, and the poignant beauty of it. He was half man, half boy. She was set alight by him almost before she realized what had happened. The thing was an idyll.

There was a secrecy about it too—an exquisite mystery. Each evening she knew that he would be waiting for her among the Rust Hall pines, his face to the sunset, the twilight at his back.

"My beloved!"

He was shy, intense, infinitely tender. They wandered in the woods with their arms intertwined and her head upon his shoulder. She let herself dream; she did not want to think of actualities, of her dress allowance that more than equalled Flodden's whole income, of that solid suburban home at Wimbledon. She just drifted with this most delightful lover—this dreamer of dreams.

"Oh—if life could be always like this!"

"Why shouldn't it be?" said the man; "just you and I."

And then he asked her to marry him, and the dream seemed to break like an iridescent bubble. The twilight became real twilight, the woods real woods; and Rachel felt a chill of realism run through her. She was a middle-class girl born of middle-class parents; she had inherited the prejudices of her people, and absorbed the essentials of her environment. It was no fault of hers that she was a charming and innocent materialist. She called it

"common sense." The thing was impossible, when measured by the Wimbledon standard, and she knew it.

"Gill, dear, it's beastly to have to think of such things. But can you—can you afford—?"

"I'm poor," he said simply; "I know that. But there's the cottage; and I'll work like a slave for you."

"Dear," she said desperately, drawing a little apart, "how much should we have? Don't think me horrible, but life's life, and I couldn't—"

He looked at her queerly in the dusk.

"I make about a hundred a year, and I get another fifty pounds from the money mother left me. The cottage belongs to me."

She choked. One hundred and fifty a year! Why, even if her father continued her dress allowance, life would be impossible. Everybody told you that you could not manage to live decently in these days on under a thousand a year.

"Gill," she said, "it wouldn't work, dear; it wouldn't work. Father might allow me another hundred and fifty, but we couldn't live on three hundred a year."

"Why not? I manage all right now."

His voice sounded obstinate and hurt.

"Yes, but things happen—illnesses and—"

"And what?"

"Children!" she blurted. "Gill, you are so unsophisticated and—"

She laid a hand on his arm, but he did not respond. The idealist and the mystic in him were shocked; to the lover love may seem everything, a sacred flame—and the butcher's bill and taxes horrible impieties.

"You mean—you won't—?"

"Would it be fair," she asked, "to me or to you? Oh, yes, dear, I know how beautiful all this has been. But then, vulgar things do matter; they might matter so much that they might spoil your work."

"I am not afraid," he said, "but it seems that you—"

"Oh, that's not kind!" she cried, "when I am trying to be honest."

He thrust his hands into his trouser pockets and turned on her with unexpected brutality.

"I see. Look here, if I had a thousand a year I suppose you would marry me?"

"To-morrow."

"So it's not the man, it's the money!"

"No, no, no! It's cruel to say that. Can't you see, Gill, dear, that I'm thinking of you? What's the use of love in a cottage—if you are always in debt."

"Thank you," he said; "I was in love; I'm not a shopkeeper."

And then she flared.

"Well, I never thought that you could be such a beast. You just want me, and you won't think of the sacrifices you might be asking me to make. Being poor, horribly poor is not unpleasant—or humiliating—is it? A girl likes to skimp and to scrape, to get up and light the fire in the winter, and wash up your dirty plates! Thank you. If you hadn't been so hard, I wouldn't have said—"

And then she turned and ran.

Flodden followed her.

"Rachel!"

There was no hesitation in her flight.

"Go home. I never want to speak to you again. Never."

He faltered and gave up the pursuit, and next day Miss Gwent returned to Wimbledon.

For a week Gilbert Flodden suffered from an intense and angry melancholy; he had been hurt and badly hurt for the first time in life; he accused Rachel of materialism, and yet he wanted her more fiercely than he had ever wanted her before. He told himself that she had failed when the supreme test had come, that she thought more of money and her own comfort than the artist and his art.

But at the back of his angry egotism a new voice made itself heard—the voice of his moral sincerity—healthily bitter and slightly cynical.

"Well, why shouldn't she?" it asked; "weren't you rather more selfish with your art and all that? And was she being selfish? Hang it, man, you would still have had the work you loved, while she would have had the pinching and the drudgery, and the preservation of your sacred peaceful atmosphere. Even an artist does owe something to his wife, and to the children she may bear him."

Flodden lay on his back in the orchard, and thought it out with his face to the sky.

"Perhaps she was right. But then—? Forget it and get back to work."

Now that was exactly what he could not do. That Roaring Boy—Life—had kicked a hole in Flodden's artistic and celibate

fence. He was not the man of yesterday, and never again would he be that man. He had wanted a woman and he had lost her; and something in him began to rebel, blindly it seemed and without purpose, but the great things of life work blindly. We understand them only after they have happened.

It was the blind force, this bitterness that made Gilbert Flodden sit down and perpetrate a sentimental and sensational novel. He told himself that he was writing it out of cussedness, in a spirit of mockery, and that when it was finished he would throw it on the fire. But there was some other force writing in him, and when Flodden dashed in a "Finis!" with a huge, ironical exclamation mark backing it, the force was still in control.

"Be thorough," it said; "you may as well carry the jest through. Send the thing up to some new publisher under a nom de plume."

Flodden followed the impulse and thought no more of it. "Passionate Peter," by Sarah Sug—how he had chortled over the choosing of that name—lay on the knees of some little god of a publisher's reader.

"Passionate Peter" was accepted and published by the firm of "Miffkin, Scales & Co."

Some three months after the book's publication Gilbert Flodden sat at his breakfast table on a rare May morning, and read a letter from Sarah Sug's publishers.

"DEAR MR. FLODDEN,—We have great pleasure in informing you that your novel 'Passionate Peter,' published under the nom de plume of Sarah Sug, is proving an immense success. The book seems likely to boom. We have sold out three big editions.

"Are we to understand that you insist upon the identity of the author being concealed?

"We are receiving so many inquiries as to the new authoress who has made so brilliant a debut. Also we are forwarding a number of letters addressed to Miss Sarah Sug through us.

"We trust that you will have a second novel ready for autumn publication.—Yours truly,

"MIFFKIN, SCALES & CO."

And Gilbert Flodden laughed. The irony of the thing was too delicious. A really exquisite little book of his own—"Sir Isumbras," published in the same month as "Passionate Peter"—had sold to the extent of three hundred and thirteen copies. Sarah Sug was booming; Sarah Sug stuffed with sugar and mockery, Sarah Sug whose heroine had a solid gold toilet service, and whose hero was strong and silent, and rude whenever he did deign to speak.

Flodden sat down at his desk and wrote to Miffkin, Scales & Co.

"DEAR SIR,—The identity of Sarah Sug must not be revealed. I am so serious in this that I should be compelled—with reluctance—to change my publisher, should you be unable to safeguard this secret.

"I am glad that 'Passionate Peter' is doing so well. I am preparing another novel for the autumn. Its title will be 'Ragged Roscs.'—Yours truly,

"GILBERT FLODDEN."

Flodden had lived the life of a hermit; but on that May morning a little shiver of restlessness and of mischief passed through him. He would go and see, taste and feel, celebrate this absurd triumph, and stroll about London thinking "I am the great Sarah Sug." He put on his best suit, and caught the twelve o'clock train to town.

At Waterloo he strolled over to the main book-stall. The first thing that he saw was a black and white placard urging all and sundry to read "Passionate Peter," by Sarah Sug. And Sarah Sug was everywhere—dotted in little circles and pyramids, a green-wrapped book with a young man with an Owen Nares's face looking appealingly at the sympathetic sex. There was a whole row of Sarah Sug. She was as triumphant as Tarzan.

Flodden went and lunched at the Ritz. He drank a half bottle of Bollinger 1911.

After lunch he strolled along to "Grampus"—that most notable of book-shops, and saw Sarah Sug plastering the window.

He went inside and asked for "Sir Isumbras," by Gilbert Flodden.

The shopman apologized.

"Sorry, sir, but we don't stock Mr. Flodden's books. No demand, you know. But we can order you a copy."

"Don't bother," said the author.

One table held a pyramid of Sarah Sugs, and no less than five women were buying copies of "Passionate Peter."

"Hang it!" thought Flodden, "I may as well be in the fashion," and bought one too.

As he was going out he walked into Rachel Gwent. They blushed, both of them, hesitated, smiling.

She glanced at the book in his hand, seeking a distraction from the shock of the coincidence.

"Oh, you've got it!"

"It seemed the proper thing to do."

"I was going in to get one."

"Take this one," said Flodden; "a presentation copy, you know."

She accepted it, and noticed that he looked better dressed than usual, and that he had an undefinable air of prosperity. She was glad—quite honestly and unselfishly glad. There was still a very tender corner in her heart for Gilbert Flodden.

"I say," he said suddenly, "is there any chance of your coming down to Rust Hall?"

"There might be," she allowed.

He could not resist a little swashbuckling.

"I'm thinking of getting a car. You might let me show you some of the places round. And I'm half inclined to have a new wing built to the old cottage."

"Are you? That's splendid."

"Come down to Rust Hall and I'll show you the place," he said.

"I'll think it over," she answered; "perhaps—July—or—August."

He gave her the look of a lover, and went upon his way.

"Something has happened to him," she thought. "Are his books selling, or has an aunt died?"

She glanced affectionately at her copy of "Passionate Peter."

So, in the humorous course of things, Sarah Sug made a great deal of money. Some seventy thousand copies of "Passionate Peter" were sold in England and the U.S.A. The cinema rights were disposed of at a high figure, and there were suggestions that the book should be staged. In his agreement with Messrs. Miffkin, Scales & Co. for the publication of "Ragged Roses" Flodden pushed his royalties to a regal percentage. It was not that he was becoming greedy.

"Let's spoil the Egyptians," he laughed, "before settling in Canaan."

"Ragged Roses" was issued in September, and proceeded to create an even greater rage than "Passionate Peter." A bishop denounced it in the pulpit; there were controversies in the press. People asked each other: "Who is Sarah Sug?" There



"There was no hesitation in her flight. 'Go home. I never want to speak to you again.'"

were rumours afloat that she was the wife of a Cabinet Minister, a governess at Tooting, and the widow of a sergeant-major who had been killed in the war.

It was not till October that Rachel Gwent came to stay with the Cornburys at Rust Hall. Gilbert Flodden received a little note asking him to tea. He went, not in a car, but walking through the woods of his world of beauty and of dreams. He found Rachel alone in the drawing-room, reading "Ragged Roses."

She blushed. There were little glimmers of light in her eyes. They were lovers again from the first glance.

"What—you are reading that!"

"I found it here. A beastly book. I'm so glad, Gill, that you don't write stuff like that."

"It pays," he said, with a queer, inward smile.

"Oh, money! Real art is above money."

He did not remind her that a man may not be able to marry and have children and a decent home on the proceeds of real art.

Mrs. Cornbury descended on them, a big woman with a red face, whose voice seemed to come down from the clouds. She was quite kind to Flodden, and with that patronizing kindness that is poison to a sensitive man's pride.

"You really ought to write a book like one of Sarah Sug's, Mr. Flodden. Why don't you? She's a marvellous seller."

The cynic and the idealist in Flodden clasped hands and exulted. And then he received a rather delightful shock.

"Mr. Flodden could never write such books. Only idiots."

He looked across at Rachel. She was angry, genuinely and generously angry—the impetuous girl defending something that was sacred.

"My dear!" said Mrs. Cornbury; "I hope I haven't said anything rude? But—really—"

Flodden thought it time to intervene.

"Success is a relative thing," he laughed; "it depends on what you set out to do." And, he added to himself: "Sell tinned meat or carve like Rodin."

But he looked softly at Rachel. That flushed face of hers had made him understand many things that had seemed contradictory and strange.

She strolled half way across the park with him, and they were lovers once more—children of the autumn, moving amid

the golden glory of the beeches. Flodden talked to her of the cottage and of the alterations he contemplated making, and he asked her advice.

"Yes, I love that old Sussex style," she agreed.

And then he grew very serious.

"You were right, Rachel, and I was wrong."

"Oh, Gill! A woman feels—understands so much—by instinct."

"I know. But I am better off now; I have come in for some money, and I am making more. My idea is to have a little flat in town, and to enlarge the cottage and run a car."

"Gill!"

She broke in on him impetuously, and then became confused and silent.

"Well?"

"Don't tell me all that. It sounds as though— Oh, what am I talking about?"

"Beloved!" he said, "will you marry me?"

To his astonishment she burst into tears.

"Oh, Gill, of course I will. Only—you'll think me mercenary; and so I was—for both our sakes—until I thought that I had lost you."

He took her into his arms.

"You were right. I realized that—afterwards. To live in a world where people get swollen-headed over silly tinned cab-horse, one has to do a little tinning on one's own. Do you think I should like to know that people like Mrs. Cornbury enjoyed talking about 'Poor Rachel Flodden; she's no better than a household drudge.' And they would send us their spare vegetables—and feel fat and superior! No, damn it; a man must do some swashbuckling in a world like this. Dear, will you marry me?"

"Yes," she said.

Gilbert Flodden spent a dreamer's evening, walking up and down in his autumnal orchard under the moon. A faint white mist was creeping up from the valley and slowly enveloping the black trees. The night was very still.

"Beauty and love," he thought, "yes, it is worth a few years of bondage to be able to enjoy them."

He found himself pondering the problem of success. To dream one's life on paper, or to dream it in flesh and blood, triumphantly, among pleasant and spaci-

ous surroundings? Which should a man choose? The high and precious ideal might be very well for a celibate, but for the man who would build the larger and more human habitation the prosaic and solid foundations come before the fancy work up above.

On the day of his marriage he asked himself:

"Shall I regret it? Am I selling my inspiration?"

He wondered.

Gilbert Flodden's gardener-chauffeur met him at the station with the car, and drove Flodden up through the oak woods and the meadows to the cottage on the hill. It was still known as the cottage in spite of its two new wings carried out in oak and plaster and old red tiles, with

in her lap. She was serene—serene as the garden.

Flodden kissed her, and it seemed to her that there was an added tenderness in the kiss. Her eyes overflowed with soft light.

"Had a good day, dear?"



"My dear!" said Mrs. Cornbury. "I hope I haven't said anything rude? But—really—"

overhanging gables and leaded windows. The "house beautiful" standing in the midst of beauty—a beauty that was both English and Italian—that was how Flodden saw it on this evening in June.

He smiled. He had the eyes of a happy man.

"Hallo, Daddy!"

Two brown youngsters with bobbed hair made a rush at him across the lawn.

"Hallo, hallo!"

They hung on his hands as he crossed to where Rachel was sitting in the shade of the Siberian crab. She had her work

"Splendid."

For Flodden had been to town to see his publishers, not the publishers who were known to Rachel, but Messrs. Miffkin & Scales, who published the novels of Sarah Sug.

"Gentlemen, I am glad to say Miss Sarah Sug is dead."

"But, Mr. Flodden, you are not serious?"

"Quite serious. Miss Sug is dead, and she has left me thirty thousand

(C. E. Brock)

pounds. You will please take the necessary steps to have her death announced in the papers."

Their glum faces had amused him.

"The secret must be kept. You can retain all future royalties as your share of the compact. I have made my plunder."

Flodden reached for his wife's hand.

"Let's go round the garden."

She went, holding to his arm, and as they paused above the long grass walk that descended between masses of blue delphinium and white lilies to the little Italian garden with its statues and fountain, she looked up and saw that her husband was smiling. There were little wrinkles round his eyes, and she felt vaguely that this smile was not for the garden or for her, but for all life, life as he saw it.

She kept silence, and the silent moods of a woman are often the most eloquent.

"It's good," he said presently, "very good."

She rested her head on his shoulder.

"Have I helped you, Gill? I used to be such a little barbarian."

He kissed her. His eyes were happy, wise, gently cynical, but his cynicism never touched his home.

"You have made me," he said; "I believe all this is going to teach me to do really big work some day. We have dug our foundations. We have spoiled the Philistines. Life is good."

Flodden went to the library after dinner, and unlocking his safe took out all the Sarah Sug manuscripts and the copies of the agreements with Mifflin, Scales & Co., and made a bonfire of them in the fire-place. He stood leaning against the oak chimney place, watching the paper blacken and burn, turning it over from time to time to make sure that all was consumed.

"It is better that she should never know," he thought.

In the midst of the fire a page uncurled

itself and showed him for one brief moment the title of "Passionate Peter." He smiled, and watched it disappear.

"I have served my five years' bondage for Rachel and the children," he said to himself; "and it was worth it."

There was nothing left but smouldering ash when Flodden's wife came in search of him. She found him in the dusk, standing by the fire-place.

"I thought you might be working, Gill?"

"No, only burning a lot of old rubbish," he said; "even an author has to have a spring-clean sometimes."

They were at breakfast the following morning, and Flodden, having glanced casually at the daily paper, laid it down within reach of his wife. At the end of the meal, when the children had run away into the garden, she picked up the paper and looked at it. Flodden waited.

"Why, Sarah Sug is dead!" she exclaimed; "that horrible woman!"

"She must have left a lot of money," said the husband. "I wonder who she was! Does it say?"

Rachel read the paragraph aloud.

"The identity of this popular novelist still remains a matter of mystery. We are informed that Miss Sarah Sug left instructions that the secret of her identity should be kept even after her death. She appears to have been a woman of great silences and great reserve."

Flodden was filling his pipe.

"Rather unnecessary," he remarked; "in five years her blessed novels will be as dead as she is."

He was right.

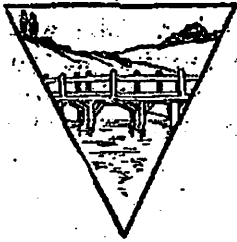
But when Sarah Sug was dead, Gilbert Flodden became very much alive. His "Happy Orchard" was hailed as a masterpiece, bringing beauty and comfort into the hearts of many who had struggled and suffered. It was a happy and wise book, and into it he had poured all the laughter, the tenderness and the tears of a happy man's home.

SENORITA

I THINK the night is like a Spanish maid
With wide-brimmed eyes of soft and
sombre shade;
Neck, brow and breast their beauteous lines
enshroud
Within the dim mantilla of a cloud.

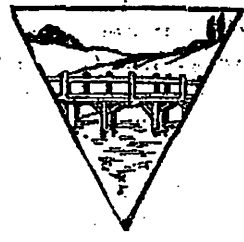
Yet lest lost loveliness should cause regret,
To please her vanity the gay coquette,
There, where her ringlets wreath a rich
festoon,
Slips for a silver comb the crescent moon.

A. G. J.



RENUNCIATION

By WARWICK DEEPING



THE man lying in the little cradle of rock above the river, looked up at his friend and smiled.

"Run for it, Michael. I can't walk another yard. I'm bound to be taken."

Michael Bassano, who was standing beside him, seemed to hesitate. He glanced at the stony bed of the river and at the great golden plain that stretched beyond it into the splendour of the sunset. He saw white villages glimmering, a road black with the wreck of a retreating army, smoke rolling from farms that had been set alight. His handsome face had a pinched, tired pallor, but he had enough courage left to sneer.

"Yes, everybody is in a great hurry."

He turned again to his friend, but Paolo Sabbatini had fainted. He lay there on the rock, a mere boy, white as ivory, one hand thrust into his tunic, the sleeve of which was all red.

Bassano's sneer ceased to be impersonal. He stood and considered Sabbatini as though some sudden idea had entered his head. His black eyes glistened. He was older than Sabbatini, far more the man of the world, and though the charming cynic in him had laughed at the boy's luck, there had been an edge of bitterness to Bassano's laughter. He had always despised Sabbatini, feeling himself so much more clever and more strong, so far more suitable a mate for one particular woman. The day had been a day of cynicism, vibrant with the cry of "Everyone for himself," and Bassano gave a shrug of the shoulders.

"Life is opportunity," he said.

He bent over Sabbatini, removed a ring from the man's finger, and extracted a leather wallet from the inner pocket of his tunic. There were letters and a girl's portrait in the wallet, and Bassano examined them—still sneering.

"Let us remember the emotional touch!"

He brushed one or two of the letters and the photograph against Sabbatini's

red sleeve, saw that the stain had transferred itself to the paper, and then slipped the wallet into his own pocket. Sabbatini was wearing a silver chained disc on his right wrist, and Bassano removed it. He carried it, dangling on one finger, as he crossed the rocky bed of the river, with the water purling about his boots, and when he reached the farther bank he threw the disc and chain into one of the shallow pools.

"Explicit," he said, looking back at the mountains.

The sneer of the opportunist still seemed to hang in the curves of his pinched nostrils as he walked off over the fields towards the sunset.

It was winter, and at the Villa Toscana on the outskirts of Venice a girl sat at a window overlooking the gardens. She was a tall girl, very calm and pale, with eyes that were as black as her dress, and far more sad. The stone paths of the garden had not been swept and were littered with fallen vine leaves that looked like pieces of bronze. The pale winter sunlight seemed to wrap the cypresses in a yellow mist, and a sea-fog was drifting up over the lagoons.

Francesca Toscana had been sitting there an hour. The room was cold, but though she was rich she had denied herself a fire, and life seemed so cold and dead in Venice that she would have accused herself of apathy rather than of self-sacrifice. She was waiting for a man, Captain Michael Bassano, and Bassano was late—but what did one man's lateness matter when another man was dead!

She heard footsteps at last. The door opened and closed, and she was aware of Bassano standing there and looking at her with eyes of compassion. She had never liked this man, and she had chosen Sabbatini's boyish fire rather than Bassano's handsome and charming cleverness, but on this winter

day her heart felt softened by the loneliness and the pathos of her memories.

Bassano bowed to her.

"I am here—at last. For a month I have been asking them for leave."

She had risen and he bent and kissed the hand she held out to him. He appeared much moved, and she was surprised and touched by his emotion, for it was new to her, an emotion that seemed disinterested.

"It was good of you to come; I'm grateful."

He sat down with the air of a man who was a little ashamed of his lack of self-control.

"Do not thank me for coming. It is one of life's sacraments—my coming here. I suppose you have had no news?"

"None."

She had turned to the window and the garden strewn with dead vine leaves, and she did not see the start of exultation in his eyes. She sat down on the red cushion, her face half averted, and when Bassano began to speak she did not realize for the moment that his voice was a caress.

"It is what I feared. He was dying when I left him. Will you forgive me for paining you?"

"Am I the only woman in Italy who grieves?"

"Ah, you have courage. I think that Paolo knew that he was dying, I knew it, or I should not have left him. We talked it over, there at the foot of the mountains, with the horror and shame of that disaster in our hearts. 'Clear out, Michael,' he said to me, 'I'm done for, and Italy will want you.' So I went."

His emotion appeared to master him, and the eyes of the woman at the window looked at him with a new kindness.

"Paolo was right," she said.

He was feeling in his pocket and he brought out the wallet, and a little leather case that contained a ring.

"He asked me to bring these to you. 'Take them to Cesca,' he said, 'and look after Cesca for me, Michael.' I tell you this because they were his last words, and I do not matter in them, for they are sacred to you."

She took these relics and letting them lie in her lap, bent her head over them

as though she were praying. She was thinking of Paolo, who had died at the foot of the mountains, but into this sanctuary of her thoughts pressed the consciousness of this other man, this man who seemed so human and so alive.

Bassano had risen. She had a momentary glance of his face, and she saw that he seemed overwhelmed with emotion. He had turned away as though to go.

Her heart went out to him.

"Michael."

"Forgive me—"

They held hands, as though they felt themselves to be comrades and something more than comrades in this moment of emotion. Then Bassano went quickly towards the door.

Three months later Francesca Toscana was married to Captain Michael Bassano in the church of Santa Maria at Venice. Paolo Sabbatini was dead, and Bassano had caught her in a moment of great loneliness. He had been clever, tender, full of a delicate sympathy that had been careful not to frighten her grief, and Cesca was still but a shadow of herself, a woman who had lost something that she would never regain and who asked for comradeship and kindness.

Bassano was kind—with the kindness of a worldling and a cynic.

"In six months," he said to himself, "Paolo can come back to life, if he is still alive. By then I shall have made this woman love me."

In a hospital hut on the edge of an Austrian pine wood a man sat writing a letter. He wrote it with great effort, for he had lost his right arm and was teaching his left hand to write. Nor was the effort merely physical; a great red scar slanted down over one eyebrow, and the man's face had a strained and twisted look, as though he was learning to think again—as well as to write. It was Paolo Sabbatini who had been wounded a second time and in the head while he lay helpless on the rocks. Through long days of complete unconsciousness he had climbed slowly back to a little glimmer of light, the knowledge of the life about him. For weeks he did not speak, nor did he appear to understand anything.

that was said to him. His identity was unknown. He could not tell them who he was.

But one day early in the year when the sun was shining, and the pines were very green against the blue of the sky, Paolo walked out into the forest and sat in the sunlight at the foot of a tree. A bird was singing, weeks before Spring, and the singing of the bird seemed to touch something in Sabbatini's brain.

Suddenly he remembered.

"I am Paolo Sabbatini."

It was like a revelation.

"I was wounded. Bassano was with me."

He looked about him as though he had been asleep.

"It must be the Spring," he thought.

"I was to marry Cesca in the Spring."

In some such way Sabbatini came to write that letter, sitting hunched up on his bed in his stained and threadbare old uniform, while he scrawled grotesquely and painfully with his left hand. It was a love-letter that would wring a woman's heart or fill it with exultation.

Francesca read the letter in the month of March, the day before her husband was expected home on leave. And suddenly she was like a woman who had lost her way, in darkness, not knowing where to turn. Paolo was not dead, and as she walked up and down the garden she realized that her love for him was not dead; it had burst the coffin in which she had laid it, and stood comforting her with outstretched and passionate arms.

What was she to do? What could she do? Tell her husband? And then those innocently sinister words in Paolo's letter.

"Michael must have told you that I was all right, and only a prisoner."

She stood staring.

No, Michael had not told her that. And that ring and those papers! She was horrified, challenged, looking into the eyes of a memory that seemed deep with treachery.

Next day her husband came. His blood and his thoughts were full of her; he appeared as her lover, gallant, witty, supremely playful. She was in the garden, sitting on her favourite seat where the water of the

canal lost itself in the blackness of the tunnel over which a part of the house was built.

He came to kiss and to hold, but her face was dead. She repulsed him.

"No, not that."

He grew stiff, watchful, ready to meet a long expected crisis. His vanity, his strong friend, did not desert him. He had begun to believe that Cesca loved him.

"Well, here I am. It is good to be here, *cara mia*." He avoided the clumsy, direct question.

It did not avail. The woman in Cesca had entered the valley of torment; tortured, thirsty, she cried out for the truth.

"Paolo is alive," she said.

She made herself look at Michael.

"What!"

He appeared astonished, overwhelmed.

"Good God! Where are we? I can't grasp things, dear. But how did you hear?"

"A letter," she said.

"From him?"

"Yes."

He put his hands to his forehead, and seemed to be trying to think.

"May I see it?"

Her answer would mean so much, and he waited for it in the silence of his pretended bewilderment.

"No, I cannot show it to you. It was meant for me—"

"A love letter?"

"Yes."

And then she drove herself to walk open-eyed towards the truth.

"Michael, we must talk this out, or life will be too horrible—"

He glanced at her set face, and knew that she mistrusted him.

"Of course," he said; "we must tell each other everything."

"Those papers and that ring?"

"Paolo gave me them."

"And he sent me what he thought was his last message?"

She did not help him by telling him what was in that letter, yet Michael had foreseen some such scene as this. Nothing would carry conviction except an air of supreme self-confidence, of innocent candour.

"Of course, *cara mia*. Could I have imagined it?"



"She waited, wondering. And then she heard a faint sound, the splash of an oar . . ."

"Yet Paolo says——"

But Bassano interrupted her. He rose and stood facing his wife, and with an air of passionate seriousness.

"Oesca, let us be careful. You are asking me questions that I do not

understand. It is almost as though you suspected me——"

"Someone has not spoken the truth," she said, "it is either you or Paolo."

He maintained an air of immense patience.

"Do not say that of either of us. The shock of the thing has shaken us both, but let us keep our heads and our tempers. Tell me, what happened to Paolo after I left him, for there may be some other explanation."

She looked at him quickly.

"He was wounded again."

"Ah!"

"In the head. He was unconscious for days, and his memory did not return at once."

Bassano suppressed the laughter of his triumph. He went close and bent over her with a protective tenderness.

"Don't you see, *cara mia*? Paolo forgot."

She was as still as the stone form on the pedestal beside the seat.

"He forgot that he had thought he was dying, and that he had given me those letters and his ring?"

"Yes. The wound in the head wiped out the memory."

She did not move.

"Would to God that I could believe it," was her thought, yet some instinct would not suffer her to believe that Michael had told her the truth.

Months passed, and Michael Bassano found that he was a stranger to his wife. All the intimate part of marriage was put aside. She lived like a nun in the Villa Toscana, a calm and very quiet woman whose beautiful dignity could neither be conquered nor disarmed. They met at table, were polite, carefully courteous to each other—but all Bassano's cleverness could make no conquest of this woman's soul.

His cynical sangfroid began to desert him, and one autumn night he lost himself in a mood of passionate violence, thinking to master her coldness with the strength of a man. He had come upon her suddenly, sitting in the belvedere at the end of the terrace.

"Cesca, am I not your husband?"

She put his hands aside.

"Paolo is my husband," she said; "do you not understand?"

He stood off, trembling, ineffectual, repulsed by her mysterious dignity.

"Have you no pity?"

"We are all to be pitied, Michael, and it was foolish of me to marry you. I love Paolo, and this love of me is sacrament; it stands between us, and makes this marriage of ours a lie."

She spoke gently, but with a calmness that was fanatical.

"No, do not fear that I shall break my vows. This love is sacred to me, and I shall not tarnish it. I shall live as your wife in name, never again will you be my husband."

Her calmness, and the strength of it, frightened him, for Bassano was a man who grew weak when life seemed a failure.

"But this is mockery! Am I to be nothing?"

"Poor Michael," she said with a sudden stare at him, "why did you tell me those lies?"

"Lies——"

"Yes. Oh, do not protest; it is so useless. There was some deeper sense in me that knew that you were concealing the truth. You call it a mockery. I call it a living death for all of us."

He stood facing her and trying to speak, but the tragic candour of her eyes silenced him. And suddenly something in Michael Bassano seemed to crumble. The anger and the pride of the worldling failed him; this woman whom he had loved and lied to seemed to have taken his heart from his body, and was holding it in her hand, and showing him all its meanness. The pity in her voice was more potent than the crack of a whip, and in that instant of self-revelation—his cynicism fell to pieces.

He turned away.

"Yes, they were lies."

He expected anger, and again she gave him pity, and her pity painted the portrait of his most despicable self.

"Michael, how could you kill your friend?"

"Kill him?"

"Yes, for you killed all that life might have given to him and to me."

"I loved you—too much," he said.

"But what a love! A cheat and lie, a love that was doomed to bring unhappiness to us all. How is it possible for me to think of you as my husband?"

He stood there for a moment with his right arm over his eyes.

"Yes, that's true," he said; "I thought myself such a clever devil, thought that I could make life grow as I pleased. What a fool!"

He turned to her with new courage.

"I'll go back—now—to-day, to the world of men. Justice is blind. Let her strike; I'll not flinch from it."

Michael Bassano left Venice that night; next day he was with the army.

One night in October a one-armed man with the pale face of an ascetic arrived at the little Hotel Milano. It was Paolo Sabbatini, an exchanged prisoner, frail, starved, with burning wounded eyes. He had the look of one who had laced himself in steel. His face had come with courage through months of suffering, anguishes and lonelines of the soul, hatred, love that had starved itself.

The motherly woman in the hotel bureau looked at him with eyes of pity.

"There is one who has suffered."

She watched him write his name with his left hand, and she noticed how quiet his voice was when he asked her for a sheet of note-paper.

"I wish to write a letter."

He sat down at one of the little tables and wrote to Cesca.

"I am here—in Venice. I must see you, or I shall die. You can trust me.—PAOLO."

That letter of Paolo's left Cesca without sleep. She had known that some day he would come to her, and she had feared it as one fears pain. The Paolo who returned might be so different from the Paolo of her heart.

In the morning she sent him a note.

"I trust you," was all she said in it, and faced a day of tragic suspense.

It was five o'clock and yet Paolo had not come. She went into the garden, to her favourite seat by the canal where the great arch showed black above the blackness of the water. Dusk came, and a moon rose in a deep blue sky, shining upon the vine leaves and the white stone and upon Cesca's face that was as white as the stone. The water in the canal was as still as the sky.

She waited, wondering. And then she heard a faint sound, the splash of an oar, and the drip of water from it like water dripping in a well. The tunnel held the sound and carried it. She saw a little square of light in the blackness under the arch, a light that moved and sent a broken beam towards

her along the surface of the water. It was the lantern on the bow of a gondola floating like some mysterious boat of the dead up out of the underworld.

She waited, motionless, feeling that Paolo was near her, the Paolo of the old days, that inspired boy, her lover. There was a troubling of the water under the arch and a troubling of the depths of her heart. The boat came gliding out with its lantern shining, as though it were offering her light. The gondolier—a very old man—a Charon—brought it to rest between the big mooring pillar and the wall.

Cesca had risen, and was standing in the moonlight.

"It is you."

He stepped ashore, and even in the moonlight she could see his thin starved face and burning eyes. The empty right sleeve was pinned to the front of his tunic, a pathetic sleeve. He looked older—older by ten years.

"Wait," he said to the gondolier.

She touched the empty sleeve with the tips of her fingers, but he seemed to wince at the touch.

She led the way into the garden and towards the broad pergola where roses trailed against the moon.

"I have come to say good-bye," he said, his voice strained like a tense wire, "I wanted to see you for the last time."

Her heart uttered a tragic cry, but she was calm to the death.

"So you must go?"

They stood facing each other, Paolo stiff as a martyr tied to a stake.

"Let me speak. You know that I love you, Cesca, and that my love has been a sacred fire. It burns me, but it shall not burn you, for you are the one sacred thing the world holds. When you told me of Michael's treachery, I felt that I must kill him. I used to lie awake at night, and think how I should do it, and of the exultation of doing it. I could think of nothing else. And then you came between us. You wrote that you still loved me with the old love, and when I realized that, I knew that it was impossible for me to kill the man. One does not play the butcher in one's holy of holies. He has killed our happiness, but happiness is not life."

He paused and stood looking

straight at the moon, and his face was the face of a saint.

"I saw that I should have to go away. I could not let the fire in me spread to you. And the world—and most women—will think me a fool, a poor thing without passion. 'Take' is the world's cry, 'take—seize what is yours. What is love but an outrage.' But no, real love is a giving up, a passion to protect. I do not know whether you can be happy with Michael."

She bowed her head.

"It will never be marriage between us, and yet Michael has changed."

He glanced at her quickly.

"How?"

"When a vain and clever man loses his vanity, Paolo, he may look in the glass and see his real self. I think that Michael saw that. He went back ashamed."

There was some struggle taking place in Paolo's soul. She was conscious of it, and she felt that she could read his thoughts. He was picturing a regenerated Michael, a man who yet might win the love of a woman, and his struggle was against the bitterness of Bassano's ultimate triumph. Yet—could he grudge Cesca her happiness if life should give it to her in the end?

She held out a sudden, impulsive hand to him.

"No, I shall never love him, Paolo. He will never win what you have held."

Sabbatini was silent. He had spoken his last words, and the effort had exhausted him. These last intimate moments tortured him with their helplessness, and he could not bear the temptation of her nearness.

"I must go."

She understood. He was at the end of his courage, desperate, a wounded man saving his flag. She went with him to the canal, and there they said good-bye.

"When do you leave Venice?"

"To-morrow."

He bent and kissed her hand.

"Good-bye."

The lantern swung round over the still water and became a dim star in the darkness of the tunnel. The drip

of the water from the old man's oar was like a rain of tears, and Cesca was left alone there, bewildered, trying to realize that it was the end.

Paolo Sabbatini was watching his luggage being carried out when a man ran into the vestibule of the hotel.

"Lieutenant Sabbatini!"

Paolo turned.

"I am here."

"A letter, signor. I was afraid you would be gone."

Paolo opened the letter clumsily and slowly with his left hand.

"Come to me," he read, "Michael has been killed."

He stood a moment, and then sat down on one of the chairs, his head nearly touching the top of the round table.

"Holy Mother," said the woman behind the desk, "he has had bad news, he is ill!"

She went to him, but Paolo had raised his head, and his face was like white light.

"Let my luggage be taken back to my room. I am staying."

"You have had good news, signor?"

"Yes," he said vaguely, "good news."

He walked like a man reprieved. The boat that carried him seemed to float through the sunlight and the shadow, a thing of light and air. In a little while he was sitting at Cesca's feet, hiding his thin face like an overwrought, sick child, letting her hands heal him.

And Cesca's eyes were greatly solemn. She had that sheet of paper on her knees, close to Paolo's thin face. She read it again and again.

"Captain Michael Bassano died in the moment of victory, covered with glory, leading his men."

Her eyes filled with tears, and one of her tears fell on Paolo's face. He looked up.

"My beloved—you weep."

"It is pity," she said, "and something deeper than pity. He has given us back our happiness like a brave man, with generous hands. Do you forgive him?"

"I forgive him," he said, "for has he not made life clean?"

Mike's Father

By Warwick Deeping

"Taracoopa smiled back at him, shrugged its shoulders, and chirruped something about 'To-morrow.'
 "When pressed to remember that to-morrow might be too late, Taracoopa showed its white teeth, and answered:
 "'There has been no fire in this city for twenty years.'"



THE doctor was in a hurry; a good-natured man made irritable by overwork. Moreover, he never expected the Hoopers to pay his bill.

"Get her out of England; get her anywhere you like out of this sponge of a country. What? Born in South America, was she? Well, get her back there. Good morning."

This abrupt advice, jerked out between the bedside and the top of the stairs, was to carry Tom Hooper, his wife and Mike out of the little yellow-fronted house in Highbury and across the Atlantic in a German emigrant ship. Mr. Tom Hooper ceased from catching an early bus at Highbury Corner and spending the day in the office of Godson & Fog. He was a quiet, pale little man, who must have had the colour of adventure somewhere in his blood, and he may have had some vague realization of what life would be if Mary Hooper died. Godson & Fog were important people—shippers. They gave Tom Hooper a letter of introduction to a Mr. Gallowglass in San Rosario, and proceeded to forget all about him. Tom Hooper sold his furniture that had been paid for laboriously on the hire-purchase system, and departed in the *King Frederick* with Mike his son and Mary his wife.

It was a mad adventure, but these two sanguine and foolish

people stood on the deck of the *King Frederick* as she sleeked her way into the harbour of San Rosario, and felt sure that this new world would be good to them. Mike stood between them, holding their hands. He, too, had a sense of adventure.

"Daddy, shall we see the sabbiges?"

It seemed heartless to explain to Mike that there were no savages in the great white town that resembled a marble amphitheatre built in the half circle of green hills. Tom Hooper remembered that there would be Indians and negroes.

"Black men, son."

"Do they have tommyhawks, father? And bows and arrows?"

"No. They are civilized. They wear trousers like we do."

"Trousers!" The glamour had gone out of Mike's dream.

Tom Hooper looked at his wife. She was smiling, opening a heart of hope to this new white world with its clear and radiant atmosphere.

"Isn't it beautiful, Tom?"

"It is," he said, picking up Mike and kissing them both. "Good luck to us all."

It was an amazing city, this San Rosario, with its sunny spaciousness, its great mysterious houses, its blue bay and its trees. Little Mike, trailing along and holding to his father's hand, looked up into the faces of these swarthy, chattering people, and at all the strangeness of the streets, and remembered Saturday afternoons spent at Olympia and the Zoo.

Mike's Father

"Daddy!"

"Yes, son?"

"Isn't it like the monkey house?"

His parents exchanged a look over the top of Mike's head, but they did not laugh, nor did the child guess that these two wonderful people—the god and goddess of his childhood—were suffering from a sudden attack of home-sickness. They felt a little lonely, lost, bewildered. San Rosario had become a great white image, a savage god, and they were its victims.

"Hallo! Here we are."

The voice of Mike's father sounded loud and cheerful—a sort of Christmas Eve voice rising above the creakings of a very limited and overloaded income. Mike saw a white building with brown shutters, and painted across the face of it "Hotel Blanco." A greasy man with a black beard stood in the doorway picking his teeth with a match.

Mike noticed that this man looked queerly at his mother. His two eyes glistened like glass marbles. Mike thought him a very rude man, for when his father raised his hat and spoke to him, the man spat on the pavement and just nodded.

"We have been recommended to your hotel, señor," said Mr. Hooper in very bad Spanish. "We have just arrived. The luggage will follow."

The man made them a perfunctory sort of bow, and stood out of the way.

"Delighted, sir." And he resumed operations with the match.

The Hotel Blanco was not as white as its name, and Mike found his mother looking with an air of distrust at the sheets.

"They have been used, Tom."

"Have they, by George," said Mike's father. "I'll see about it."

Mr. Hooper disappeared, and Mike fancied that he heard a number of voices all speaking at once. Presently Mike's father returned. He did not look happy. His moustache seemed to droop.

"All in use. We must make the best of it, darling, for a night or two. Besides, you know, the prices seem pretty stiff."

"Yes, we have got to be careful with the money," said Mike's mother.

"Oh, don't you worry," said Mike's father with an air of explosive cheerfulness. "When I get a post with Gallowglass we'll look up a nice little villa or something, with a view of the bay. A bit of garden for you, and sunshine and sea breezes."

Mike's mother kissed his father.

"Yes, everything is going to be all right."

Their first night at the Hotel Blanco was not as restful as it might have been, but the Hoopers had breakfast in a sort of veranda, and Señor Black Beard sat at a table close by, and was very polite, smiling much at Mike's mother. Mike's mother had red-gold hair and wonderful white skin, and it appeared natural that the man should smile at her, but somehow Mike did not like it. When breakfast was over Mr. Hooper brushed his coat, patted his hair and tie while looking at himself in a mirror, and went out to call on Mr. Gallowglass. Mr. Gallowglass occupied a building in the Plaza de San Antonio, and Tom Hooper found it without much trouble. He was received by a Jew clerk whose nose looked as though it should have been decorated with a gold ring.

"Is Mr. Gallowglass in? I have a letter of introduction from Messrs. Godson & For."

"Mr. Gallowglass is away," said the clerk.

"When will he be back? To-morrow?"

"Perhapth to-morrow."

"I'll call in to-morrow," said Mr. Hooper, and went out feeling strangely depressed, though why he should feel so depressed he did not know.

The Hooper family spent the morning in exploring San Rosario

By Warwick Deeping

They walked down to the sea, and, following the broad road that skirted the bay, found themselves in what seemed to Mike a world of white palaces. Each palace had a garden, and great, shadowy masses of trees, and in the distance floated a purple cloud of mountains.

"Can't we have one of those houses, daddy?"

"They cost a lot of money, son."

"Haven't we a lot of money?"

Tom Hooper laughed—a rather wry laugh.

But in a while they came to the end of Mike's palaces, and found themselves in a smaller, simpler world, a world of market gardens and groves of trees, and houses that seemed to paddle their white feet in the sea. There was one particular house that caught Mary Hooper's fancy, a minute white bungalow surrounded by a wall and shaded by trees. A notice in Spanish announced that the bungalow was to let.

"I could be happy there, Tom."

Her man looked at her lovingly.

"Just the place," he said. "We'll have it. You see."

On the following morning Tom Hooper left the Hotel Blanco directly after breakfast and walked to the Plaza de San Antonio. Mr. Gallowglass was in. The Hebrew clerk disappeared into an inner office, and Tom Hooper heard a deep voice rumbling explosively. The Hebrew reappeared, looking frightened.

"He see you."

Hooper was shown in.

He found a very fat man with a red face and a square head sitting behind a desk reading a paper. Mr. Gallowglass was in his shirt sleeves; his feet, tucked into grey felt slippers, were resting on another chair. He glanced up fiercely at Mike's father, who looked pale and meek beside this staring bull of a man.

"What do you want?"

Hooper produced the letter of introduction from Godson & Fog.

Mr. Gallowglass read it, and then dropped it into the wastepaper basket.

"Very nice of 'em!"

He swung his feet off the chair and turned on Mr. Hooper.

"Well, what can you do, you bummer?"

Mike's father stared. Mr. Gallowglass's attitude was so savage, so unexpected, so primeval. He felt that he was shut up in a yard with a very big and bad-tempered bull.

"I beg your pardon," he said meekly.

"Damn it, what can you do?"

"I have had seven years' experience as a clerk. I——"

Mr. Gallowglass did not tolerate elaboration.

"Anything else?"

Tom Hooper could not think of anything else. He had once built a chicken house out of old egg boxes.

"No, sir."

"Then what the hell did you come out here for?"

"My wife is not strong."

"Good Lord!" said the fat man.

"What fools! We want men out here—hustlers. Better go home again. Good morning."

He picked up his paper, put his feet back on the chair, and gave Mr. Hooper to understand that the interview was closed. And Mike's father felt paralysed. He stood there, smoothing the crown of his felt hat, his tongue pressed against the roof of his mouth.

"Excuse me——"

Mr. Gallowglass turned on him.

"Well?"

"Have I any chance of——?"

"Not a dog's chance. Good morning."

Mike's father swallowed something that might have grown into an appeal, turned, and walked out of Mr. Gallowglass's office. Mike noticed that his father looked rather white and strange when he returned to the hotel. He kept putting his hat down and picking it up again.

"Well?" said Mike's mother with something like fear in her eyes.

Mike's Father

"No good, old girl."

"Oh, Tom!" said Mike's mother, and then bit her lip.

Next moment she was smiling, for Mike's mother had courage.

"Well, we'll try something else. Go and get your hat, Mike. It's such a lovely morning."

From that moment all the energies of Mike's parents were concentrated on "trying something else," but it appeared that San Rosario was utterly indifferent to Thomas Hooper's necessities, and could give him nothing to do.

Mike had a feeling that things were going very wrong. They did not seem to get any nearer to that little white bungalow by the sea, and Mike was troubled by the strange behaviour of Mr. Black Beard, who owned the Hotel Blanco. The man was always sliding in out of nowhere, smiling and showing his teeth, and staring with his glassy eyes at Mike's mother. There was a day when he patted Mary Hooper's shoulder, and Mike saw his mother's face flame. The man said something to her, and Mike's mother went from red to white. She took Mike by the hand and went up to the bedroom. She put on Mike's hat and walked out of the Hotel Blanco.

They sat on a seat under a tree, and waited for Mike's father, and when Tom Hooper returned, Mike was told to run away and play in the public garden across the road. He went, but he stood and watched his parents through the railings.

Mike's mother told his father something, and Mike's father seemed very angry.

"I won't go back."

"There's a fortnight's bill."

Tom Hooper took a shabby wallet out of his pocket and counted out some paper things.

"We shall have to break into the nest-egg, old girl."

"We won't do that. I'll sell Aunt Eliza's ring. You look after the boy. I'll manage it somehow."

Hooper crossed the road and sat

on a seat in the gardens with Mike, while Mary Hooper walked away.

"Where's mother gone, daddy?"

"To do some shopping, son."

"Daddy, why was mother angry when that man——"

"Don't ask questions. Put your hat straight."

They sat on the seat in silence, and presently Mike's mother returned, and Mike noticed that the ring with red stones was missing from her finger.

She gave a roll of paper to Mike's father.

"Not so bad, Tom. Now we had better look about for a new home."

The search for a new home took a long time, and when they found it Mike thought it ever so much shabbier than the Hotel Blanco. And it smelt, a queer, oniony smell.

Things went from bad to worse, and Tom Hooper began to grow desperate. His pride was vanishing, for a man's pride is apt to grow as shabby as his clothes, and the little ex-clerk could see himself becoming a seedy sponger, a sneak-thief—even something worse. The Hoopers were stranded. They had not enough money left to pay their passage back to England. And then Mary Hooper fell sick.

Tom found a doctor who spoke English. He was a Scotsman with a fiery head and an equally fiery face. He came, he saw, and he repeated those fatal words that had brought the Hooper family across the Atlantic.

"You must get her out of this."

Mike's father looked helplessly at the doctor.

"Yes, I know. But we shan't be able to afford—as much as this—at the end of a week."

The Scotch are supposed to be a mean race, but the Scotch doctor lured Tom Hooper out on to the stairs, slipped something into his hand and fled.

Mike's father looked at the money.

"If there's luck in a kind heart," he thought, "mine's turned. Dash it, let's have a last shot!"

By Warwick Deeping

He went out and wandered about San Rosario, and in one of the big streets he had the privilege of seeing two half-castes slash each other with knives. A woman sitting at a window screamed for the police, and Thomas Hooper looked at the woman. She was fat and handsome and evil; and as Tom Hooper's eyes descended from looking at her they alighted on something else—a row of gold letters above a window.

"British Imperial Insurance Co."

Thomas Hooper crossed the street.

Five minutes later he was interviewing a long, lethargic man, whose face was the deathly white face of a spirit drinker.

"I want a job," said Mike's father.

The pasty-faced manager threw away the stump of a cigar.

"Nothing doing, my friend. You can't get these people to jump. They haven't the buck of their own fleas."

Hooper was trembling.

"Mayn't I try?"

The other man looked at him more attentively.

"Down and under?" he asked.

"My wife's sick—and I'm broke."

Hooper saw the other man wince.

"All right!" he said. "Can you speak Spanish?"

"I've picked up some."

"Take the train to Taracoopa, and see what business you can do. I'll give you the chance, see."

"God bless you!" said Mike's father.

Thomas Hooper pocketed a wad of insurance forms, and rushed round to find the Scotch doctor, and ask him to look after Mary for two or three days. The news that he brought to Mike's mother was worth more than much medicine.

"I've got a chance—at last."

He kissed Mike and Mike's mother, and dashed off with the old black handbag to catch the evening train to Taracoopa.

Tom Hooper did not arrive at Taracoopa till after midnight, and he put up at the Hôtel San Miguel—

a piece of extravagance that seemed good policy. He did not sleep very well, for he was haunted by the face of his sick wife, and he was in a fever to go out and take Taracoopa by the throat and compel it to swallow fire-insurance policies. He rose very early and took a look at Taracoopa from his bedroom window. The hotel was on a hill, and he saw the loose-knit, battered, brown old town flowing round about him in the early sunlight.

Thomas Hooper took great care with his toilet, breakfasted, and set forth to attack Taracoopa. He selected what appeared to be the principal street, and began to work it methodically with his best smile.

Taracoopa smiled back at him, shrugged its shoulders, and chirruped something about "To-morrow."

When pressed to remember that to-morrow might be too late, Taracoopa showed its white teeth, and answered:

"There has been no fire in this city for twenty years."

Thomas Hooper refused to be discouraged. He fought that happy, apathetic smile, and that blind belief in "to-morrow"; he distributed literature; he offered cigarettes. Taracoopa seemed charmed with him, but he did not place a single policy. Only one citizen was rude to him, and that was a Spanish Jew named Mendoza, who kept a big store in the Plaza de San José.

Thomas Hooper was growing a little irritable, and he barked back at the Jew.

"I wouldn't insure you against your chance of going to hell. It's a certainty."

He lunched at the hotel, and went out again for the second round; but Taracoopa still smiled, smoked his cigarettes and said "To-morrow."

The veranda of the San Miguel appeared to be a forgoing place for the wealthier citizens of Taracoopa. Throughout the evening they sat round little tables, drank, smoked, and argued with

Mike's Father

immense animation. One or two of them were gentlemen whom Mike's father had interviewed during the day, and they bowed to him and gave him that eternal smile.

Hooper was not feeling sociable.

"Take it off. I'm tired of it. The whole place is teeth and to-morrow."

He saw Señor Mendoza sitting at one of the tables, swarthy and prosperous, and swelling himself out like an Assyrian bull. Here was your successful man, one of the plutocrats of Taracoopa!

Mike's father became the victim of a sudden rage.

"Damn it! I'd like to see the whole blasted place on fire! Then they'd grin and talk about 'To-morrow,' and make tooth-powder of the ashes. Oh, hell!"

He knocked out his pipe, and got up to go to bed. He had reached the doorway when he became aware of a commotion on the veranda. Men were jumping up and looking out over the city. Something prodigious and unusual seemed to be happening down yonder.

"A fire!"

"Santa Maria—a fire!"

"Close to the Plaza de San José."

"It looks like Mendoza's store."

The Jew had risen with a sort of howl of incredulous wrath. He jumped on a chair, his teeth shining in his black beard.

"It's a lie!"

"Run, Moses, run!" someone shouted; "the sacred bush is burning!"

The Jew got off the chair and disappeared; and Hooper, pushing through the crowd, looked down into the darkening town.

There was no doubt about it. Taracoopa had a fire—the first fire for twenty years.

Before Tom Hooper went to bed he heard that Mendoza's store had been burned down, but that the fire had been extinguished before it could do further damage. Mike's father was rather disappointed.

He was still feeling bitter against Taracoopa, and, like Jonah, he was quite ready to watch a prophetic vengeance fall upon the city.

The proprietor of the hotel showed himself suddenly and mysteriously polite to Mr. Hooper. He accompanied him to the foot of the stairs.

"I trust the señor will sleep well."

Hooper was dog tired, and he felt that even Taracoopa's smile could not keep him awake.

"I always sleep well."

"The señor will not be leaving to-morrow?"

Hooper stared at him. What did the fellow mean?

He turned in and slept like a tired soldier, unhaunted by dreams, and he slept so soundly and so late that he found himself being roused by one of the hotel servants.

"A gentleman to see the señor."

Hooper sat up.

"What's the time?"

"Eight o'clock, señor."

"What's the gentleman want?"

The man smiled and shrugged. A second servant appeared.

"Three more gentlemen to see the señor who made the fire."

"Made the fire! Good lord, what next!"

Thomas Hooper rolled out of bed. He dressed in a great hurry, wondering whether it would not be safe for him to bolt from Taracoopa before the wild men came to lynch him for setting light to Mendoza's store. He went downstairs rather timidly, to be met by the proprietor, whose smiling politeness suggested that Mr. Hooper was a man of importance.

"The señor will breakfast before seeing anyone?"

Certainly, Mr. Hooper would breakfast.

"Perhaps the señor would like a table and chairs put ready in the veranda."

Mike's father stared at him.

"Just as you please."

He was a little scared. Through the window of the coffee-room he could see the courtyard filling with

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people, and the veranda was crowding with men who smoked and argued. It was all very absurd. But had these excitable gentlemen jumped to the conclusion that this little English insurance agent had set Mendoza's store alight? If so, were they going to put him up for trial?

Thomas Hooper thought of his sick wife and Mike. He finished his breakfast, called for a cigar and walked out on to the veranda.

There was the same Taracoopa smile. A dozen men were taking off their hats to him. It was obvious that they had been waiting for Mr. Hooper's appearance.

"Good morning, gentlemen. What can I do for you?"

They came crowding round. A tall man, with a short grey beard and laughing eyes, held out his hand to Mr. Hooper.

"Very clever—very clever. But how did you do it?"

"Do what, señor?"

"Burn Mendoza's store down?"

Mike's father went very red. He began to explain in his broken Spanish that he had nothing to do with the burning of Mendoza's store, but the more he protested the more the men smiled. They did not believe him. They patted him on the back; they laughed; they seemed to regard him as a devilish smart fellow.

"No fire for twenty years. Then, you come; you ask us to insure our houses, and we say: 'To-morrow.' Then Mendoza's store is burnt down! Oh, señor, the coincidence is too remarkable!"

"Well, what about it?" asked Mr. Hooper, beginning to feel rather touchy.

"Why, we have come to insure."

Mike's father sat down rather suddenly on a chair. Of course! Why the dickens hadn't he jumped to it before? Taracoopa was at his feet.

He put on an air of smiling importance.

"At your service, gentlemen.

Boy, fetch me my bag from the bedroom. Bring ink."

Taracoopa crowded round him, and Thomas Hooper was anchored there all day, interviewing the citizens of Taracoopa, who were in a hurry to escape the fate of Mr. Mendoza. Mike's father issued over seven hundred policies in that one day, and banked the premiums. He rushed off at last to send telegrams to his wife and to the manager of the British Imperial at San Rosario.

"Staying on. Struck oil. Wire me how you are. Hôtel San Miguel, Taracoopa.—Tom."

Mike's father remained for three more days at Taracoopa. He insured pretty well the whole town, including seven churches and a monastery. Mendoza the Jew tried to get up a case against him, but Mendoza was unpopular, and Mr. Hooper was advised to ask the chief of the police to dinner.

He did so.

That was the end of Mendoza. He came up next day to arrange for the insurance of the new building he intended to erect.

When Tom Hooper returned to San Rosario an astonished manager shook him by the hand.

"How did you manage it?"

Mike's father told him the truth, and the manager sat down and laughed and laughed.

"Well, you're a fixture with us, Mr. Hooper. A man with luck like that! I suppose you would like a cheque for your commission?"

"I should," said Mike's father.

He rushed to that very shabby hotel.

"We'll have that little bungalow, old girl, we'll have that nice little bungalow."

And Mike was puzzled by the strange way his elders took their pleasures; for Mike's mother wept, and Tom Hooper was no better than his wife.

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Art and the Man

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"She caught a sudden unerring and spiritual glimpse of the supreme vanity at the back of this man's soul. She suspected that he was pitying her for not having married him; that he was pitying her for having married John Luce. There is a devilry in love, a divine cunning that dissembles its anger until the blasphemer has been caught and thrown into chains."

HE was a handsome person, with a nice taste in tweeds and ties, his little black beard trimmed to a point, his hair not too flagrantly long under the brim of his Panama hat. He had set up his easel in the field above John Luce's holding, just where the old sunk orchard lay like a pit of mysterious green gloom.

The landscape was just such a one as suited Winstanley's clever and suggestive romanticism. There were the dun harvest fields, the pine woods purpling the horizon, the meadows sloping greenly to a stream, and John Luce's house in the foreground, a queer, spacious, poetical place, rich tinted by time, lichen and creepers, with two tall Lombardy poplars standing like question marks against the sky.

But John Luce was at the wars, and Clarence Winstanley, youngest of the R.A.'s, sat and painted his house and trees, serenely detached from barbaric scuffles, quite satisfied with the picturesqueness of his own personality, and inclined to be cynically amused when he thought of the fool mobs tearing each other to tatters across the Channel.

Winstanley had been painting there two days, long enough for him to become aware of a sun-browned, auburn-haired young woman busy with many duties about the house over yonder. He was conscious of her chiefly as a creature with warm brown forearms bare

to the elbow and a shining head, a creature who wore a white blouse and a russet skirt, and who gave him a distant impression of autumn comeliness. He saw her gathering apples down in the sunk orchard; he saw her feeding the chickens in the paddock; he even saw her hoeing turnips and forking potatoes in the fields. Her labours seemed to him to be quite picturesque and pleasant. He contrived to think of her symbolically as Ceres. His attitude towards Nature was always a little patronising; he chose his models critically; undoubtedly he felt that he was honouring a landscape by deeming it worthy of being the subject of one of his pictures.

Winstanley had only seen "my lady of the soil," as he called her, from a distance. He had not the faintest notion as to who rented the house, what its name was, whether the woman in the white blouse owned it. Winstanley dealt only in pleasurable abstractions. Crude facts, the names of people, their exact relations to the life around them, did not interest him in the least.

But he was a vain man, vain with the vanity of a self-conscious celebrity. He considered himself to be a feminist; he was quite sure that he understood women. Your bachelor generally claims to possess an intimate knowledge of the other sex. He fancies himself as a travelled man; the mere father of a family is an inexperienced boor.

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Clarence Winstanley was bored on that particular morning when he saw "Ceres" gathering apples. She had come quite close to the hedge that divided the orchard from the lane. It occurred to him that it would be pleasant to go down and discover if she really was worth looking at. He could talk to her over the hedge, ask to be allowed to paint the garden or the orchard or the coachhouse, or something; make himself very charming, a thing he knew quite well how to do. It struck him also that "Eve" as a name suited her better than "Ceres." Eve among the apple trees! The pleasant sensuousness of the idea amused him.

He made his way down into the lane, and along it till he was within ten yards of her. Her back was turned to him, and she was reaching up to pick a particularly fine yellow apple on one of the branches above her. He stood still a moment, admiring the curves of her bare arm.

"Excuse me——"

She turned sharply with the apple in her hand. Her eyes flashed an immediate surprise. Clarence Winstanley had walked into a situation that proved itself unexpectedly dramatic.

"What! It's you?"

He echoed her exclamation with genuine astonishment.

"And you—Kitty?"

They looked at each other like old friends who had not met for years, and then had blundered into each other in a South American wilderness.

"What an extraordinary thing! I have been daubing away at this landscape for three days. I wanted to make a study of that bit of wood over there——"

"Yes; it is rather strange."

"Absolutely melodramatic. I had sighted you at work and christened you 'Ceres.' I came down to ask

if I might trespass on your property. You live here?"

"Yes. I've been here five years."

They were regarding each other interestedly, for Winstanley saw in her the girl whom he had wanted to marry, the girl who had mellowed into the far more mysterious woman of thirty. She was very good to behold, sun-browned, strong, with a brave depth of gaze, and the air of a woman who had known great happiness.

"Five years! And it's seven since——" He smiled at her with an air of forgiveness. "And I'm still a bachelor. They say that bachelors age prematurely. You can see that I have a few grey hairs."

She smiled back at him, but her eyes had not forgiven him for the things that he had said to her seven years ago. She remembered the bitter raging of his vanity. "Well, marry the fool!" he had said to her. "He's healthy and affectionate, but he'll bore you to death in a year." Winstanley had shown her his real self seven years ago; her innate distrust of him was not changed by the fact that he was famous.

"You haven't aged in the least, Kitty."

She contradicted him sharply.

"Oh, yes, I have."

He laughed.

"Sincere and candid as ever! Of course, you are mellow——" He gave a little foreign shrug of the shoulders. "But one only gets oneself into trouble trying to be debonair with a clever woman! And life has been kind to you?"

She noticed the critical, appraising look he gave her, but she felt convinced that in many respects Clarence Winstanley was as spiritually blind as ever. That confident and picturesque egotism of his was more polished and more complete, but she suspected that he did not

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understand life, but only painted it as an arbitrary and selfish colour scheme.

"Are you staying here?"

"I? Oh, yes, up at the village—at 'Ye Peacock.' The Freshvilles at Burnt Castle are friends of mine; they wanted me to stay with them, but I'm quite a simple soul and fond of my own liberty. What about the great man—Farmer George?"

"You mean my husband?"

She gave him a look that would have warned a less self-centred man that he was approaching sensitive regions of reserve. Winstanley missed her challenge. He thought that she wished to hide things, to brazen it out that John Luce satisfied her soul.

"You know—it's inexcusable—but names slip one's memory."

She prompted him.

"John Luce."

"Of course. And you two have been farming all these years?"

"What better life is there?"

"Arcadian."

She resented the shadow of patronage that he chose to throw across the sunlight of her married life.

"It's a good life—an honest life. You can't call it pretentious."

"No, no. But where——"

He paused delicately, with a suggestion of sympathetic circum-spection.

"Where? Oh, I see. Where do you think my husband would be? He's out at the Dardanelles."

There was a depth of human feeling in her voice, and Winstanley showed what a crass and clever fool he was by failing to pick up the true note. He had no ear for real, elemental, human music. He thought that John Luce was like many other men who had been married for some years—only too glad of the chance to rush out upon a great adventure.

"Of course—you're proud of him?"

She answered a little wearily.

"Oh, I suppose so. We women have to be content with such emotions."

Winstanley's soul smiled slyly to itself.

"And you're carrying on—at home?"

"Yes."

He looked at the sky and down into the green depths of the orchard with an air of artistic madness.

"One always ends in a holy platitude. The strangeness of life—and all that. I hope it won't crush to-day's coincidence."

"In what way?"

"You will let me come and see you?"

She caught a sudden unerring and spiritual glimpse of the supreme vanity at the back of this man's soul. She suspected that he was pitying her for not having married him; that he was pitying her for having married John Luce. There is a devilry in love, a divine cunning that dissembles its anger until the blasphemer has been caught and thrown into chains.

"It will bore you."

"Dear lady, what a poor opinion you seem to have of me. Do you know I should most immensely like to paint your portrait."

"You see, I'm a very busy woman. I don't sit still till the lamp is lit."

"I could get a moving impression."

She gave him a laughing, Eve-like look.

"Very well, come and try. And you can tell me all about—the world. I'm just a rustic——"

"No, you are like a woman out of Spenser. You ought to be in the Academy."

"There, all responsibility leaves me."

Clarence Winstanley walked back

to the village, thinking those thoughts that rise like bubbles out of the depths of a man's consciousness. Kitty was still quite charming. He was not quite sure that she did not appeal to him more as a very comely married woman than she had appealed to him as a girl. Of course, there was always the eternal lure, the fascination of a thing that is forbidden. He wanted to make love to her, partly because it would be a pleasant method of passing the time, partly because his egotism demanded a revision of her original choice. It was a mean motive, but a very human one. He wanted to make her realise that she had made a mistake. Not that he confessed to such a motive, even to himself, but there it was—a subtle streak interwoven with the inordinate self-love that characterised him.

Kitty went on with her apple picking, an incipient frown lining her forehead. Yet there was a suggestion of merciless fun in her eyes. Presently she put her hand into her blouse and pulled out a letter, and, leaning against the trunk of an apple tree, re-read it in the light of the day's experience.

It was a boyish, tender, ingenuous letter scribbled on a War Office memorandum sheet. John Luce had used a biscuit tin as a table as he told her, and he had written under the shade of a rock that jutted up amid the scrub of the peninsula. It was a letter that filled a woman with an infinitely motherly yearning. It was full of home and of her. He wanted to know about everything, about her: how the potatoes were looking, whether the barn roof had been mended, whether she was overworking herself. He talked about his work; he was keen on it, but keen with the grimness of a man who wanted to get a dirty job done with so that he could come home.

He was hoping to get his majority. It meant more money. She was not to stint herself; nearly all his pay was accumulating at the bank.

Kitty's face smiled over that letter with a beautiful tenderness. He was her man, her good comrade. She had never loved him as she loved him now.

When he came back——

But he might not come back. She had faced that possibility, faced it in the black of the night when she could not sleep for thinking of her man. She had conquered those panic moods, and had grown cheerfully and desperately brave. They had had six happy years together. No one could take away her pride in him or her right to those happy memories.

She put the letter back into her bosom, and thought again of Clarence Winstanley. And when she thought of him, she laughed—laughed almost joyously.

Winstanley was not slow in entering upon his campaign to convince Catharine Luce that she would have been happier if she had had ambitions. He did not begin at once upon her portrait; as a matter of fact, he was not a great portrait painter, being too facile and too lacking in sincerity. He began by painting the orchard, making a study of its light and shadows, and occasionally he saw Kitty.

It struck him that she seemed shy and a little reserved, but since Winstanley was never shy the conversation went ahead.

"Do you stay here all the winter?" he asked her.

She had to confess that she did.

"Good heavens! What do you do with yourself?"

"Work."

"In the evenings?"

"Oh, read, and make up accounts, and sit in front of the fire. John goes to sleep."

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Winstanley looked at her with tragic sympathy.

"But you're wasted. You used to have a very pretty discrimination."

"You see, we rear a good many chickens," she explained.

"Chickens!"

The burden of her boredom should have been complete.

He progressed, expanded from brotherliness to a very definite sentimentalism. As for her attitude towards him, it was delicate and provocative. She seemed to know by instinct how to interest Clarence Winstanley. He liked things to be secret, romantic, and somewhat deceitful. And she played the will-o'-the-wisp to his egregious vanity, wondering whether he would be fool enough to let her tumble him into the mud.

At last he began upon her portrait. She insisted on posing for it in the middle of the lawn and in full view of the house.

"But there is no background," he pleaded. "Not the proper, miraculous atmosphere."

She contradicted him flatly.

"The house makes a very excellent background. Don't you like the mellow redness of the bricks?"

"It strikes the wrong note with your hair."

"Oh, bother my hair! Shall I dye it black?"

Then the serene and plethoric Granny who looked after the kitchen and was an ancient nurse of Master John's, had to be brought out to help look through the household accounts while Kitty sat and posed. This annoyed Winstanley, annoyed him excessively; besides of all the trivial, sordid stuff, butchers' bills and differences of opinion with the grocer.

Then there was that boy. He looked a peculiarly stupid boy. He arrived from nowhere suddenly with a wooden basket and an old screw-

driver, and a bit of sacking to kneel on. His particular duty appeared to be to weed the long brick path from the porch to the gate; but Winstanley hardly ever caught him in the act of removing a weed.

"Do you always live in public—like this?"

"We are very busy people. Besides, one gets into the way of it in the country."

"The great lady among her women, eh?"

She gave him a sudden significant look.

"Things are more remarkable in the country than they are in a town."

Then Clarence Winstanley saw light, or imagined that he saw it. He walked home in a state of gloating exultation. Women were devilish clever! And that suggestive gleam of the eyes that she had given him! She was creating possibilities, but creating them shrewdly, with an air of innocence. Marriage, especially a boring marriage, made a woman much more subtle.

Her very guardedness rendered him more impressionable, more enthusiastic. He began to admire her immensely, perhaps because she appeared so interested when he talked about himself. He was working up towards an exchange of confidences, intimate confessions that might end in a very flattering little affair.

And Kitty read her letters from John Luce, and laughed with a kind of malicious heroism. She had a full view now of Winstanley's egotism, and she was prepared to give him battle.

In a week he was making open love to Kitty, and she was encouraging him. Winstanley's love-making was not a thing to be described as pleasant. It lacked manliness, betrayed too much slime and honey, and a certain grinning,

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greediness that made him quite loathsome to the woman.

He had finished her portrait, and had gone back to the orchard. It was a mysterious, solitary place, shut in by high hedges, the very setting for romance. Winstanley was playing for mutual confessions.

"I have never loved a woman as I loved you."

That was what he meant to say to her; it was a lie, but men like Winstanley, the heroes of many "affairs," have to lie in order to be convincing.

But first he wanted her to hint that her marriage had not been a success, that life might have been different if she had chosen the great man and not the gentleman farmer. Then his self-love would be able to sun itself in the warmth of her penitence. Besides, she was married; that made the whole affair so safe.

So he daubed his canvas and waited, and since the woman was waiting also, his chance soon came.

"Where has the sunlight gone?"

He looked at her tenderly, concernedly.

"You know—you are bored with this place."

"Am I?"

"You might be—being what you are."

"What am I?"

He was standing, resting one hand on the trunk of a tree.

"What are you? What a dangerous question to ask me. May I answer it?"

She looked him straight in the eyes.

"Yes."

She was preparing to surrender; she was beckoning him to the attack. That was how Winstanley viewed it, and he let himself go.

"You're Kitty, the one woman whom I have never been able to forget. And I find you—the most charming of women—buried, lost

in a world of ploughed fields, looking after chickens. Good God!"

She regarded him quite calmly.

"You think I am wasted here?"

"It's sacrilege."

"And supposing I am tired of the life and want to escape?"

Winstanley had not meant to push matters to logical and desperate ends. He did not want her to run away with him; the subsequent inconveniences might be too real. He was in favour of a little local romance that could be abandoned when he was tired of it.

But he had to be gallant, and his blood was getting heated.

"Just trust me, Kitty. Tell me everything."

He held out his hands stagily; they were white, flabby hands.

"Why should I trust you?"

"Because I want you."

"Well?"

"Dear—because I love you."

He expected to see her melt, grow rosily confused, and dissolve into soft ecstasy. He held out his arms, but they grasped nothing in the shape of a climax. She remained looking at him with baffling intentness.

"How old are you?"

"Dear heart, does that matter?"

"But how old are you?"

"Not quite forty."

"I think I know your age to a year. I am twenty-nine; you were seven years older; that makes you thirty-six. My husband is thirty-four."

He dropped his hands and looked at her with quite quizzical tenderness.

"Suppose I plead guilty to thirty-six, what is the significance?"

"The military limit is forty."

He laughed.

"What a tease you are. I suppose you will be pretending that I ought to be in the Army, losing myself in this great fool's game."

"I'm not pretending."

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"You mean that you are serious?"

"Perfectly. Why should my husband be risking death while you stay at home"—she dropped her voice—"and try to amuse yourself with his wife?"

He was nonplussed for the moment. He did not yet realise that she was serious, and his attitude remained playful.

"Are we going to ask each other riddles? I've sold one of my pictures for charity; I gave fifty pounds to the Prince of Wales's Fund; but I have no intention of giving myself. If half the world goes mad, is it the duty of the few sane and really civilised people to follow the world's example?"

"So my husband is mad?"

"He wanted adventure; he wanted to go. All this nonsense about married men——"

She laughed.

"So that is your attitude. It is really refreshing—delightful—in the midst of all this miserable insanity. It does me good. Your art is above it all; we can all of us escape if only——"

He chimed in gallantly:

"Beauty is above it all. Don't you see, dear girl? Let's forget, you and I—let's be children again. I——"

He held out his hands again, and she still dallied for a moment.

"So you think you love me?"

"I know that I love you."

"Oh! exquisite—delicious!"

Her eyes lit up; her face seemed to shine with a white and radiant scorn.

"What a fool I have made of you!"

He stared.

"Yes, you are just the same Clarence Winstanley—blind with conceit. Chance brought you here. You had the insolence to despise this life of mine, as you had the insolence to despise my husband—you, a thing that dares not fight

for a great cause—you, who invent fine phrases about art to hide behind! Oh, it is immense! From the first you were wondering whether I had not regretted my marriage; you betrayed yourself so utterly. You imagined that you had only to strut and boast to make me realise what I had missed. And you were ready to amuse yourself with me; you wanted to have your revenge for all that happened seven years ago."

Winstanley was trying to look shocked.

"My dear girl!"

"Be angry, man—show some spirit. I read you, through and through. I just led you on—that my triumph might be more thorough. And you have made love to me, and you imagined that I was being dazzled. Oh, you fool! How could I love a thing like you when my man is out there fighting?"

A slow flush spread itself over Winstanley's face. His eyes tried to master hers and failed. She was too splendidly victorious.

"You have trifled with a chivalrous sympathy."

She smiled.

"Chivalrous sympathy! What rot! As if I needed your sympathy, or anybody's sympathy. I'm proud, I'm happy—yes—by God!—even if death should take him."

Winstanley had turned, and was putting his brushes and things away.

"I suppose you are to be congratulated," he mumbled.

His gibe touched the truth. And even he would have realised it had he seen her reading her man's last letter, standing out in one of their fields with her face to the setting sun.

"Dear lad, I love you."

And her heart was exultant with an exultation that challenged death.

WARWICK DEEPING.



YOUTH

By WARWICK DEEPING



RICHARD MARSLAND was enjoying himself. He had won five hundred and seventy-five francs in the course of half an hour's irresponsible play at the roulette table; also the sour and grudging approval of the rusty old German Frau who sat on his right fingering five-franc pieces with red-knuckled and greedy hands.

"Ach! you do not care whether you win or lose."

"Just the luck of the game, madame."

"Ach! you English, you play nothing but games."

Richard Marsland pocketed his winnings, smiled at the croupier, pushed his chair back, and disentangled himself from the cosmopolitan crowd about the table. He looked so young and so fresh in that rather hectic yet jaded crowd, that certain of the cynical worldlings glanced at him with amusement and perhaps with envy. The youngster's devil-may-care pose was so obvious, so virginal. He had set out with enthusiasm, even with passion, to warm both hands in the bosom of Realism.

He went out smiling, a tallish, fair-haired young man with a high colour and adventurous blue eyes. A little lady stared at him, but he passed her by. A couple of short, squarish, Southern men had followed Marsland towards the door. The little Jewess nodded at them, and made an expressive grimace.

One of the men sidled up to her.

"Good night, Delilah! So you will not have the cutting of the young fool's hair?"

"No. But such a pretty boy, too. You will not be too rough, Conrad."

"My dear, we are gentlemen. Mademoiselle Desirée is not here to-night."

"No; she has a headache. I am afraid it may prove very shocking to Monsieur Richard."

The man laughed.

"Tiens!—he is seeing life. It is good

for us that some people are in a hurry to buy their experience. We are very rotten people, my dear, and that boy thinks us so interesting."

And he went out—laughing.

Richard Marsland was getting his hat and coat from the cloak-room when the two men strolled into the vestibule. He did not put on his overcoat, but hung it over his arm, and passed out through the great swing-doors and down the steps to the casino gardens. The night was very soft and bland, all a-glitter with lights and tremulous with the distant music of violins. Even the shadowy places seemed to breathe a suggestion of mystery and intrigue. The place had an incontestable and luring beauty—the beauty of a woman who sells herself at night and is hated in the morning.

Now Richard Marsland was in love, or thought himself in love, in a high, adventurous and Byronic fashion; but the star of his passion had hid herself behind a cloud that night, and was not visible to mortal man. As the little Jewess had put it, Mademoiselle Desirée had a headache.

Marsland had not finished with the night. It was so pagan, so mysterious, so full of fascinating lights and shadows. He strolled across the gardens out into the Place de Gloire, and saw the lights of the Café Violon winking at him over the way. The Violon was a merry place, and Marsland accepted its invitation.

The two thick-set, Southern-faced men had followed him with an attentiveness which suggested that it was foolish for a young man to walk boastingly about the streets of Monte Carlo with several thousand francs upon his person.

The Café Violon was in a merry mood, and Richard Marsland's quest of the *joie de vivre* made him no chooser at such a moment. There was dancing in the Chrysanthemum Salon, and little Gelinski, the mad violinist,

was whipping the dancers with wild music.

A red-haired girl with greenish eyes held out her hands to Marsland.

"Oh, Monsieur Dick, it is you. Dance with me!"

"By George, I will!"

He danced with her, and the red-haired girl danced like a flame. The room was hot, as Monsieur Violon meant it to be; and people grew thirsty, as Monsieur Violon meant them to be. Champagne, of course.

"Can you tango, Monsieur Dick?"

"Anything!"

"Listen! Gclinski is calling. Come!"

What with more dancing and more champagne, Monsieur Richard reached a state of Olympian exaltation. He remembered Mademoiselle Desirée and the Villa des Fleurs. He would go to her; he must see her. What was a headache when a man was in love! And so he deserted the red-haired girl, threw a kingly handful of notes at fat Jules the waiter, and fled from the Café Violon like a winged Mercury.

But he did not observe that two thick-set men followed him in the direction of the Villa des Fleurs.

Champagne and love make a youngster doubly impetuous, and Richard Marsland did not go as the humble slave of ceremony. He found the door of the Villa des Fleurs unlocked, nor did he dally with such things as bells. His impetuosity was to tumble him towards ultimate wisdom, and teach him the values of life and its merchandise.

The affair was a comedy, but Richard Marsland saw nothing comic in it that night. He found himself making a blind rush down a flight of stairs and out into the street. The shrill and furious voice of an angry adventuress pursued him. These irresponsible boys may cause so much inconvenience, and the explanations can prove so awkward.

Richard Marsland was a little drunk; he was also very excited and horribly disillusioned. It is probable that he intended getting back to his hotel at Menton, but he took the wrong road when he made haste to put himself beyond the outskirts of Monte Carlo. He was not quite responsible at the moment either for his move-

ments or his emotions, and the two thick-set Southern gentlemen had him safely marked. They timed their assault so that they caught Richard Marsland at the foot of the high wall of the Villa des Roches, a rather solitary spot where stout pines over-shadowed the road.

One of them slugged him on the head with a stocking packed with sand, but the blow did not fell the youngster, and he turned and fought. There was a short scuffle at the foot of the wall just beside the villa gate before Richard Marsland was left lying there with a bloody face, torn clothes and empty pockets.

The stone wall happened to be the retaining wall of a terrace, and someone had been standing there and reflecting on the beauty of Monte Carlo and Monaco by night. That someone, being of a stout heart, ventured down the steps and through the gate to discover what sort of deed had been done in the darkness.

"Who's there?"

An electric torch flashed a white beam on Richard Marsland's face.

"Surely—it is Mr. Richard Marsland."

There are some voices that sober a man, tauten his slack wits, and pique his sprawling pride. Marsland struggled up into a sitting position, and stared at the eye of light.

"I'm—'m sorry. Who ish it, please?"

"Never mind, I will get you into the house. I suppose you can't walk."

Marsland instantly felt tempted to try and contradict her. He gathered himself up, spreading himself with ridiculous caution against the sustaining wall.

"I'm all r't!"

But the moment he tried to abandon the friendly wall he found himself sprawling across the path.

"I see. Wait there, please," said the voice, rather scornfully.

So Richard Marsland waited there till a French gardener and an English man-servant arrived and carried him up the villa steps.

He woke next morning with a dry mouth and an aching head. The incomparable and fascinating Desirée had fallen from among the constellations of the night. Byronic gloom en-

veloped him. The experimentalist was taking life very seriously.

The room was big and airy, and bright with Mediterranean sunlight. The green tops of small cypresses showed through the window and against the blue of the sea. And presently a quiet and unconvivial man-servant appeared with breakfast.

"Mrs. Hastings would like to know how you are feeling, sir?"

Marsland stared.

"All right, thanks! I shall be getting up soon. You might give my clothes a brush."

He remembered suddenly that he had been in evening dress.

"I'm afraid you can't wear them, sir. You see, sir, the shirt isn't wearable."

"Oh, hang! I suppose you couldn't borrow me one?"

"Afraid not, sir. Besides, Mrs. Hastings has given orders that you are to be left undisturbed till the doctor has seen you. She is coming herself to see you soon, sir."

Marsland sat up suddenly with a rather scared look.

"I say, I can't impose myself on people like this. Who is Mrs. Hastings?"

"Mrs. Dianna Hastings from Merrill Court, sir."

"What!"

"I don't suppose you remember me, sir—Bumpus, sir. I used to be with them there when you and Mrs. Marsland had the Dower House."

Marsland twisted round in bed, making Bumpus clutch at the tray to steady it.

"I say, I can't stay here. Get me some clothes, Bumpus, will you? I must get back to my hotel, you know."

"Sorry, sir, but your clothes aren't what I'd call presentable. I had orders to take them away."

Richard Marsland made a very poor breakfast. He had become acutely conscious of certain incongruities and irregularities, in that he should have been carried into a house that belonged to Mrs. Dianna Hastings. The coincidence was a little unnerving, for he remembered her as a particularly handsome grande dame with a quiet and disturbing sense of humour, a woman who had always made him feel

most inconsiderately young. She had been a girl friend of his mother's, and he had not seen her for three years. He wondered whether she had Kitty with her—Kitty, that shy and long-legged little piece of awkwardness whom some people had persisted in thinking pretty.

Then someone knocked, and Marsland pushed the breakfast tray aside, and tried to convince himself that he had not lost his dignity.

"Come in!"

His voice sounded sulky. If it happened to be that fool of a Bumpus, he would get the fellow to shave him. But it was not Bumpus, and Richard Marsland sat up in bed.

"Good morning. May I come in? And how are you feeling to-day?"

Dianna Hastings was a very finely built woman, with a fresh colour and grey hair. Her eyes were blue and kindly and very shrewd—eyes in which a deep and exquisite sense of humour lurked for the discomfiture of people who were pigs or fools. She brought with her into the room an atmosphere of healthy reasonableness and complete repose.

"Sorry, I'm sure, to have given you all this trouble."

She sat down in a chair at the end of the bed.

"Quite a coincidence that you should have had this adventure outside my gate. Of course, you remember us at Merrill Court?"

"Perfectly. And how—how is Kitty?"

Mrs. Hastings gave him a steady and appraising look. She ignored his question.

"Your mother and I were great friends—years ago. So she sent you abroad?"

"I came abroad—yes."

"To broaden your outlook and become a man of the world?"

She spoke quite gravely, but Richard Marsland began to suffer from a feeling of acute discomfort.

"A man ought to travel," he suggested.

"Quite so. I had heard you were here for part of the winter. And I think you met the Haldanes in Switzerland?"

"Yes. Rather dull people."

Mrs. Hastings' serene eyes gave an ominous gleam.

"I should not call the Haldanes dull. In fact, I rather associate myself with them. Of course, if you judge people by the Café Violon standard—"

She smiled, and Richard Marsland blushed to the roots of his untidy hair. So she knew all about his researches into the life of the cosmopolitan crowd! He felt angry—absurdly angry.

"I wanted to get away from English hypocrisy," he said.

"Of course. I agree. But have you really discovered the apache and the adventuress to be any more genuine?"

He could not answer her, and he knew it. So he sought refuge in polite formalities.

"I'm sorry I have been inflicted upon you. If your man could go to my hotel and get me some clothes, I could dress and make myself scarce. I'm very obliged to you as it is."

She looked out of the window.

"No. I am expecting the doctor, and I wish you to stay here till he says you may go. Tell me, have you quarrelled with your mother?"

Marsland's face grew red again.

"How do you mean? I really don't know what right—"

"No right whatsoever. But I used to be very fond of your mother. You are an only son, too."

"Well, if you wish to know, we didn't quarrel—exactly."

"I see. Your ideas differed, and you had come into your father's money?"

"Yes."

"I think I understand."

She rose, and, smiling down at him in a kind yet distant way, moved towards the door.

"I will send Bumpus to attend to you. And if there is anything you want, please ask for it. You need not see me again unless you wish to. Good-bye."

An hour later one of the English doctors walked in to deal with a very irritable and rebellious patient.

"There's no need for me to stay in bed here, is there?"

"I think you want a little less light. Do you mind letting me look at your eyes. H'm. Mrs. Hastings tells me you were unconscious when she found you."

Marsland raged.

"It's all bunkum. If they will let me have some clothes and some shaving tackle—"

The doctor regarded him with sympathetic seriousness, and then proceeded to half-close the French shutters.

"I think you were pretty badly concussed, Mr. Marsland, and I never trifle with cerebral cases. I see evidences of a good deal of cerebral irritation."

"Cerebral irritation be blowed!"

"My dear boy, I'm not going to let you get up. You will keep quiet here for a day or so. I'll send you some bromide and aspirin. Mrs. Hastings insists on your staying here and being properly looked after."

Marsland lay down and sulked.

"Oh, well, carry on. I never felt fitter in my life."

"You are not to read, mind you, or try your head in any way."

"I assure you I'll take every possible precaution."

The doctor smiled at him, slipped out of the room, and went downstairs chuckling.

"Every possible precaution! And until he behaves himself—he gets no clothes! Oh, most admirable and wise woman!"

Richard Marsland might have sulked through the whole morning had not his interest in life been piqued by another sort of *joie de vivre* that spent itself in the sunlight outside the Villa des Roches.

"Billy—Billy—come along, Billy."

He sat up in bed, and through the gap left by the half-closed *jalousies* saw a little green lawn of winter-sown grass walled in by a circle of solemn cypresses. The lawn and the trees lay below the level of the terrace in front of the house, and down the stairway from a terrace a very fat and floppy terrier puppy was making a joyous and eccentric descent. Between two of the cypresses stood a girl in a white dress holding out her hands to the puppy, her head like the head of a primrose in the spring sunlight. She had grey-black eyes, with long lashes, a skin like pink alabaster, and a figure that made one think of a sleek, soft-breasted bird.

It was Kitty—Kitty Hastings—whom

Richard Marsland had once called an "amiable gawk."

"Come on, Billy—brave boy."

Richard Marsland squatted there enthralled, watching the girl and the puppy enjoying life together. There were infantile growlings, tugs-of-war with an old scarf to serve as a rope, scamperings to and fro, advances and retreats. Marsland forgot that he had

a headache, even failed to remind himself of the cynical falseness of Mademoiselle Desirée. The girl down yonder was like a white light moving to and fro over the green grass.

That was his first glimpse of Kitty Hastings grown to be a woman. It was brief and tantalising, for, though he kept watch on the garden for a great part of the day, he did not see her



"The little Jewess" nodded at them, and made an expressive grimace"

again, though he heard her voice. It came from the room below, with the sound of a piano, and she sang the very songs he loved, and sang them with a passion and a feeling that left him thrilled and astonished.

"By Jove, she's got a soul! Who taught her to sing like that?"

The doctor called again late in the afternoon, and found a much more tranquil and chastened patient.

"Feeling better, eh?"

"You were quite right, doctor. This rest was just what I wanted."

"The bromide smoothed you down, I think."

"Rather. I feel I shall sleep to-night."

He did, in spite of Mademoiselle Desirée's treachery.

Bumpus shaved him next morning, and Richard Marsland's temper showed as smooth as his skin.

"I say, Bumpus."

"Yes, sir."

"I wonder if Mrs. Hastings would come up and see me?"

"I'm sure she would, sir. Shall I ask her, sir?"

"If you will."

That second meeting was far more welcome to Marsland than the first. He felt clean and wholesome, and his mental attitude had undergone a change.

"I want to apologise for yesterday. I'm afraid I was rude to you."

She gave him one of her wise smiles.

"Perhaps you thought me an officious old woman."

"Not in the least. I was feeling rather peeved and sore, and I am quite sure I behaved like a cub. The doctor says I am better."

"I'm glad."

"I don't think I owe him anything. I mean—that something else did me more good than his medicine."

"And what was that?"

"That singing yesterday. Who was it?"

Mrs. Hastings gave him a swift look.

"Kitty."

"By George, she can sing! I think I saw her for a moment out there in the garden."

His hostess smiled.

"Perhaps. But Kitty would not interest you in the least."

"But I never—"

"Kitty is very conventional. She is not at all like the brilliant women who make life gay down at Monte. I don't think there is any need for me to introduce you to Kitty."

"But, Mrs. Hastings, let me assure you—"

"I believe that Kitty even likes curates, Mr. Marsland. You have travelled so much farther than she has—in knowledge of the world, that you would find her crude and narrow. But perhaps you will have tea with us this afternoon? Bumpus has gone for your clothes. And after tea—you can get back to your hotel."

Marsland thanked her rather ruefully. He was quite sure that she had been treating him with most subtle irony, and he had a growing suspicion that he deserved it.

Tea completed his spiritual enlightenment. It was not that Richard Marsland was abnormally impressionable, but that most men discovered Kitty Hastings to be one of the most adorable things on earth. Richard Marsland found her eyes miraculous. They were dark as two pools one moment, and full of tremulous light the next. Her hair was the colour of old gold, very smooth and soft, and he could think of nothing with which to compare the white bloom of her skin. And she was as natural and wholesome and joyous as a young thing untroubled with any morbid egotism could be. Men fell in love with her because she was so absurdly and helplessly lovable. They fell in love with her when she sang or laughed, and when she was serious and looking a little sad and puzzled over something.

Richard Marsland was no better than any other of the male idiots who cannot help being attracted by beauty—and the sweet wholesomeness thereof. He forgot that Mrs. Hastings was watching him, forgot the bit of cake in his saucer, forgot the experimental adventures that had interested two days ago. He was to remember them later with loathing and a sense of disgusted shame.

"I say, won't you sing? I was listening yesterday."

"If you like. But mother and I—"

Mrs. Hastings rose.
"I'm sorry—we have a call to pay.
Your hotel is at Mentone, is it not? I
will see that those clothes of yours—"

"Oh, please don't trouble."
"They shall be sent on to you."

She was waiting for him to go, and
he knew it, and realised the subtle
dominance of her attitude.

"Good-bye."

He blushed—and the blush suited
him.

"You have been awfully good to me.
May I—?"

But Mrs. Hastings shepherded him
out into the loggia and down the steps
towards the gate.

"Perhaps we shall meet again some
day, Mr. Marsland, but we have not
been interested in the same sets of
people, have we?"

"No. Of course, really—you know—
I'm not—I mean—mayn't I—?"

She looked at him gravely.

"Is your mother coming to visit you
at Mentone?"

"No, I hadn't—"

"She might enjoy it. Mothers are
very lonely people—sometimes—Mr.
Marsland. They give so much, you
know, and get so little."

"I might write to her," he said.

"And perhaps she might like to bring
you here. Meanwhile—"

He understood, and she had touched
him.

"Thank you, Mrs. Hastings. I'm
afraid I have been a selfish beast."

"My dear boy, most young men are
selfish. Good-bye." And she smiled
more kindly at him as he turned to go.

A week passed, and as the Paris
train neared Mentone, about four
o'clock on a perfect afternoon, a pretty
woman, with grey hair, began to gather
her belongings together with an air
of restrained excitement. Her short-
sighted eyes were very eager and on the
alert. Obviously she was a sensitive
soul, a little too busy with her own
deals, and inclined to be restless.

"I think I may have fussed him too
much."

She said this to her handbag as she
stuffed a couple of paper books into it.

"But he sent for me; he wants me—
after all."

Richard Marsland was waiting for
her on the platform, and his conscience

smote him when he saw the light in her
faded blue eyes.

"Hallo, Mater; I'm awfully glad to
see you!"

"My dear Dick—my dear—"

He kissed her, and held her two
hands a moment.

"Tired? I've got such a jolly little
room for you; the window looks out on
the bay. And the people are really a
very nice lot. I've ordered them to
have some tea ready."

"My dear, how good of you! I
thought you'd never want me."

"Mater, I've been a fool and a selfish
idiot. One learns, you know. We are
going to have a ripping time; I've
planned it all out."

Her happy face rewarded him.

"I've never seen this part of France
before, Dick."

"You will have to learn to ride a
donkey, Mater. Can you see that
little white place up there almost at
the top of that mountain? It's a jolly
day's adventure—there and back."

"I think I shall let you go alone,
Dick."

"Oh, nonsense; I'll look after you."

A week slipped by—a most happy
and memorable week for Cynthia
Marsland. Dick appeared to have been
doing a great deal of sound thinking
and following out the inspiration that
had been called to life by Kitty's
mother. And somehow his mother had
ceased to irritate and bore him. He
found himself talking to her and con-
fiding in her as he had never done
before. Moreover, Cynthia Marsland
had been brought to realise that her
son was a man. The shock of their
temporary estrangement had given her
love a new wisdom and new eyes.

Dick let several days pass before he
spoke of the Hastingses to his mother.

"My dear boy, you don't mean to say
that Dianna is here!"

"Yes."

"Why didn't you tell me before?"

"Well, we have been quite happy,
haven't we?"

"I think they have been some of the
happiest days of my life."

"That's splendid. Would you like
to go and see them at the Villa des
Roches?"

"Why, of course. And why not to-
morrow?"

They went. It was a halcyon day, with the sea as blue as the sky, the yellow fruit all aglow on the trees, peach blossom alight on the grey hill-sides. The two mothers met with the quiet delight of women who have many and happy memories in common. Dick had little to say. He was shy and solemn, but his eyes kept wandering towards Kitty as though she had created a new mystery in his life.

They had tea on the terrace, and then wandered round the garden. Richard Marsland found himself walking beside Kitty's mother.

"I think I am rather pleased with you," she said suddenly.

He flushed and looked at the ground.

"I followed your advice, and found it the best advice that had ever been given me. I don't know what has happened, but the mater and I are just like two old friends."

"She is very happy, Dick."

"And—hang it!—so am I."

They paused to look at Monte Carlo and Monaco—visible between the trees.

"Beautiful, is it not?"

"In a different sort of way. Have you been to St. Agnes—yet?"

"No."

"I want to take the mater. Would you and Kitty come?"

"With pleasure."

"Thank you so much. The air is so clear and fine up there."

It was a very happy party that made the climb to St. Agnes two days later—a party that consisted of the Marslands, Kitty and her mother, three friends, a donkeywoman, six donkeys, and five boys. Dick kept close to his mother most of the way. She was a little afraid of the steep places, and he walked beside her donkey.

"It's all right, Mater. These little beasts never make a mistake."

And unconsciously he won favour in the eyes of a young woman who was watching him and feeling a little bored with a self-opinionated member of the English diplomatic service who formed one of the party and chose to fancy himself in love with her.

"What a nice boy!"

"Which?"

"I don't mean you, Mr. Hawtrey. I mean the Marsland boy. Isn't he sweet to his mother?"

"I really haven't noticed it."

"Perhaps you haven't. I wonder what time we shall have lunch."

They had lunch in the little white hotel perched on the grey mountain high above the sea. And Richard Marsland found Kitty's miraculous eyes meeting his frankly and with evident friendliness across the table. His face seemed to burn whenever Kitty looked at him. And once he caught his mother smiling at them both.

Then Heaven rewarded him on the homeward journey.

"I am going to ride with your mother, Mr. Marsland. Would you mind looking after Kitty?"

He turned a flushed face and shining eyes to Dianna Hastings.

"May I—really? It's awfully good of you."

She smiled down at him.

"I really think it will do you good."

"Then—it means you are trusting me?"

"I suppose so."

"I hoped that some day you might do that."

And so Kitty and Master Richard wandered down from the heights together, looking in each other's eyes a little shyly and talking with great seriousness about all sorts of things. They were on the threshold of that wonder world—that country of romance where all that is good and fine in a man rises up and arms itself for the life that follows after.

Where the mule path joins the road they met a big German, shiny-headed and sweating, trudging beside a very hard-eyed young woman riding languidly on a little white mule. She did not notice Richard Marsland, who walked on the far side.

But Marsland noticed her, and a shock of self-wonder went through him.

"Good Lord! Was I like that?"

He looked up at Kitty Hastings, and saw the clean white line of her profile, the pure lips, the clear, serene sweetness of her brows and forehead. Light indeed, and honour and good faith!

She turned her head suddenly and caught his eyes fixed on her intently.

"What are you thinking about?"

He flushed.

"Oh, nothing. Only that it is very good to be here."

The Soul of an Englishman

The Story of a White Man who believed in his Race, and a Derelict who found a Soul

By Warwick Deeping

ALITTLE crowd had gathered in the deep shadow of the narrow street between the walls of the old mosque and the house of the Greek wine-seller. It was a grave, contemptuous, dignified crowd. A tall Arab in a blue burnous stood next to an oily and handsome Levantine Jew with the head of an old Assyrian. There were two or three solemn Copts, an Armenian, and a couple of Egyptian soldiers in their white uniforms and red fezes. An old woman in black was looking out of a window. A few children crowded round the legs of their elders.

Overhead the minaret of the mosque caught the sunlight.

"Assuredly a drunken giaour is a stench in the nostrils of God."

The tall Arab's nostrils expressed scorn. He looked up at the minaret flashing white against the sky.

"What is to be done with the beast?" asked the old woman at the window; "he is lying against my door."

The Arab looked at the Armenian.

"You are a Christian."

The Armenian smiled and looked at the Copts.

"The man is English," he said; "drink is the devil of the English. Leave him to his devil."

From the old woman's doorway rose a stream of unclean language, the eloquence of Deptford, Limehouse or Blackwall. It was horrible, ridiculous, filthily futile. The hiccoughing discords of it were interspersed with snatches of song.

"We don't w-want t' fight, you ruddy blighters, but ba jingo if we do——"

A tall man in white drill passed the end of the street, saw the crowd, and caught a whiff of that Thames-mud language. He had turned aside and walked towards the crowd. He had one of those longish English faces, with very intense blue eyes, and a mouth that belonged half to a soldier, half to a priest. His white face and white figure had the calm of the sahib, but at the back of his eyes burnt the immortal fire.

"These swine talk of ruling the world," the Arab was saying, "and they are the slaves of strong drink. What say you, you Christians?"

Allan Burnell pushed gently through the crowd and looked at the man sprawling in the doorway. He had a round bullet-head, round blue eyes, a bristling fair moustache. The blond beast, good natured, so easily led, so easily fooled! His blue serge trousers were torn, his check shirt open to the waist, his seaman's jacket turned inside-out. An old bowler hat lay beside him, bashed flat—an absurd yet pathetic link with the Grey Island.

A crowd, however small and however cosmopolitan, is quick to feel the presence of some dominant figure, and this young Englishman was unusual. He had the white face of the Frank, but its whiteness seemed more than a mere whiteness of the skin. The Arab knew that this man was angry with the anger of a soldier. The Copts only saw pity; the Armenian sensed scorn.

"Stand up."

The drunken sailor stared at him.

"You go t' hell."

"Stand up."

The crowd watched in silence. There was a conflict of wills between these two giaours, and something more subtle than a conflict of wills. In

Burnell it was pride of race wielding a scourge.

"Stand up—you Englishman."

He spoke very quietly, like a doctor speaking to a hysterical girl. The man on the stones seemed to open his eyes more widely. He began to say something, blinked, and tried to obey. But his legs failed him; he sprawled sideways against the wall.

"Can't do 't, gov'nor."

A boy with a jar full of water had joined the crowd. Burnell looked round, saw the big earthen jar, and, showing the boy a coin, spoke to him in Arabic.

"Will you sell me that water?"

The boy grinned and offered the jar. Burnell took it and, standing over the sailor, emptied the contents in a cataract over the man's head and body. He gasped, he spluttered, and he screwed up his eyes; he began to swear.

"Gawd's truth—"

Then he saw a hand held out.

"Hang on to that."

Allan Burnell looked down into the amazed blue eyes of this drenched blackguard. A strange pity stirred in him, a sudden tenderness for the man of his own race sprawling in shame at the feet of this eastern crowd. It was wrong; it was damnable.

"Come on; I'll give you a hand to your ship."

"Ain't got no ship."

"How's that?"

"Had the chuck."

He made another attempt to get on his feet, and Burnell caught him by the arm.

"What's your name?"

"Bob West."

"Well, where are you going? Where can I take you?"

The man's blue eyes lifted to Burnell's.

"The docks. There's a doss-house kept by a Frenchman. But say, mister—"

"Well?"

"I can't go along with you. I'm a swine. Even these black blokes wouldn't touch me."

He tried to draw himself up.

"A swine; that's what I am. It seemed to come over me when you roused me. Queer, ain't it? Why,

now in Whitechapel Road 'oo would 'ave cared?"

To Burnell there was an almost absurd pathos in this unsteady, flopping figure. The man made him think of a derelict-hanging and rather helpless dog that needed the hand of a master. Burnell was unusual: a man whose ideals were stronger than the conventions of his class, and in that Alexandrine street he performed one of those gracious, human and eccentric acts that recall the lives of the early saints and martyrs.

"All right," he said, "I will take you to my hotel."

In the next street they met a carriage, and blackguard Bob was pushed into it.

"Take your coat off; it's inside-out. And button up your shirt, man."

There were struggles and contortions, Burnell assisting, while this sobered blackguard became like an astonished and obedient child. His blue eyes looked bewildered. His old bowler hat was pushed out into some semblance of its original self, and placed upon his head. Burnell spoke to the Egyptian driver, who had been watching this ceremonial with immense solemnity.

"Orient Hotel."

They drove off—the crumpled blackguard and the Englishman in white. The blond beast looked more and more bewildered. It fingered the dust rug, stared at the back of the driver, felt the band of its collarless shirt, and made furtive excursions with its round eyes in the direction of the man in white.

"Say, mister—"

"Well?"

"Where you takin' me?"

"To my hotel."

"What for?"

"Because you are an Englishman and a white man."

Bob West looked at his dirty hands, the frayed sleeves of his coat. His thoughts seemed to be groping towards some inexplicable and strange motive.

"Don't understand it," he said.

And then he added:

"I ain't no bug for that sort o' bed."

Burnell seemed to be thinking. There was only one language that could be

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used to this grown-up child, the language of utter simplicity.

"A clean man is fit for any bed," he said.

"But I ain't clean."

"Why not?"

The two men looked straight into each other's eyes.

"I 'aven't 'ad no cause to be clean. I was brought up dirty, and I've stayed dirty. Who cared?"

"I care."

"You?"

"Yes. Shall I tell you why?"

"All rite——"

"Because I'm an Englishman; because I'm proud of England; because I know what the English can do in a country like this. I want the people here to say: 'The Englishman is a white man; you can trust him.' And then I find you drunk in the street, playing the blackleg on me."

West stared. Then he gave a sort of shout and tried to climb out of the carriage, but Burnell held him back.

"Lemme go, mister."

"No."

"Damn you, lemme go."

"I won't. Sit still. You have got to look yourself in the face."

Bob West sat still. He was awed by something that he had never met before on either side of Suez. He let himself be driven into the courtyard of the Orient Hotel. He staggered upstairs, half-conscious of the glistening whites of astonished eyes; he was bathed, he was put to bed; he slept the sleep of the dead. When he woke next morning there was a new suit of clothes on the chair beside the bed, and a boy in a white jacket was offering him coffee.

An hour or so later the French clerk in the bureau smiled a good morning at a sheepish, blue-eyed man in a ready-made suit, whose face shone as though it had been polished for a week.

"Where's my bloke, mister?"

"Sir Allan Burnell left zis morning, sir. Yes, zee bill ees paid."

The blond beast looked troubled.

"Gawn?"

The clerk handed him a card.

"He leave this for you."

Bob West took the card between a

stubby fore-finger and a broad flat thumb.

"Sir Allan Burnell," he read. "English Consulate, Cairo."

It was very hot; the sun-blinds were drawn, and a soft rich yellow light filled the room. Burnell was sitting at his desk reading his English mail, and on the desk stood the photo of a girl. He kept looking at her and smiling as he read one of the letters, and the smile wrinkled the skin at the outer angles of his eyes.

"Love is stronger than death," a voice was saying, "and yet a man loves so many things and will give his life for them. Sometimes I am a little afraid of your idealism. There are times when I can see it sacrificing the one thing that a certain woman loves."

Someone knocked at the door and the porter entered.

"What is it, Smith?"

"Excuse me, sir, but there's a man downstairs. Says he's got to see you."

"Who is he?"

"He won't give any name, sir. Looks like an old soldier or a sailor."

"Show him up, Smith."

Burnell smiled. "Now, I wonder——"

The question was answered by the man who walked into the room, and stood with his back to the closed door, holding his hat in his hands. His eyes were set in a stubborn blue stare. There was hatred in it, and there was something very near to devotion, for a simple man's emotions are blossoms on the same bough.

"So it is you, West."

"Yes, it's me."

They looked steadily at each other.

"Well, what do you want?"

"A job."

"What kind of job?"

Bob West's mouth worked, and his eyes stared. He had a new motive in him that clamoured for expression, and his self expression had been little more than a physical explosion, a debauch, a storm of expletives, or some good-natured act tinged with animal sentimentality. But Burnell had put his hand into this man's vitals and twisted them, and there was a moral ache in West's stomach.

"I didn't ask yer ter do it."

He glared, and clenched a fist.

"Do what, West?"

"Wash me. I was a dirty swine, wasn't I, and then you came along and showed me the dirt. All rite for you, mister, but what abart me? Suppose you 'ave dug up me bloomin' soul, ain't you responsible?"

Burnell's head went back. He seemed to be looking into the distance at the Grey Island in the northern seas, and in that moment of vision he beheld all manner of things, a strange jumble that had infinite meaning. He saw slum streets, the lights in a pub window, two drunken women fighting, children with faces all jam and soot, costers' barrows, a man going home with a bag of shrimps. All etched in grey and in black, and most damnably significant!

His eyes came back to the blond beast.

"You are right," he said, "quite right. The responsibility is mine."

He stood up and held out a hand.

"Do you want a job with me?"

"Yes."

"What can you do?"

"I could clean your boots, and I can cook a bit. I wouldn't mind scrubbin' the floors. And say, mister, I don't want no pay."

"No pay?"

"Not a farthin'."

This time it was the blackguard who had the aristocrat astonished.

"Why not?"

"Ain't I got a hotel bill and this soot up against me to start wiv? An' there's more than that. I'll be pawnin' my bloomin' soul to you."

Burnell smiled.

"We are up against each other, West. I'll take you."

Burnell's villa was on the outskirts of Cairo, and not very far from the Nile, a square white house in a garden that was shaded by acacias and palms. His servants were Egyptians, and into this bachelor establishment Bob West came like a wild genius out of the North. The first days were days of conflict and of discord. The blond beast had brought a new passion, and an almost romantic motive into the life of the place.

Returning from the Consulate on the third day of West's sojourn, Burnell found Hassan sitting on the steps, rocking from side to side and shedding tears. Hassan had been Burnell's valet, a feckless but amiable creature, comfortable and sleek as a cat.

"What has happened, Hassan?"

"The yellow Englishman—he beat me."

"Why?"

"I go into his honour's room to brush his clothes, and the yellow man he came and take me by the neck and throw me down the stairs. A very jealous beast, your honour."

Burnell spoke words of comfort to Hassan and entered the house. In the great cool vestibule Bob West was standing like a soldier at attention, arms stiff, shoulders squared, blue eyes at gaze.

"What have you been doing to Hassan, West?"

"Interferin' with my job, sir."

"He wanted to brush my clothes."

"Part of my job, sir. No black man is goin' to touch your things while I'm around."

Burnell concealed a smile.

"Very well, West. I will put Hassan in the kitchen."

And so it went on.

About the sixth day Abdul, the gardener, presented himself before his master and displayed a swollen eye and a cut lip. He was voluble, excited, pained.

"This yellow man has beaten me."

Abdul had no explanation to offer. The affair seemed to have been an act of God, inexplicable, a whirlwind, a storm of dust. Burnell called West.

"Why did you beat Abdul?"

"For selling them flowers, sir."

"What, the carnations?"

"That's it. Caught 'im 'anding 'em over the wall."

Burnell had an affection for these carnations, for the plants had been sent from home.

"Abdul, did you sell those flowers?"

The gardener protested.

"I gave but three to the child of a widow."

"E's a liar," said West, "I saw 'im 'and a whole bunch to a nigger, and 'e got the money for them, too. I



"Carry me to Menha, and I give
you money"

found it in his bloomin' petticoat.
'Ere it is."

At the end of a month Bob West had made himself a dictator in the house of Allan Burnell. He ruled justly but with fear, and his foot was upon the necks of the Egyptians. He was smart, clean, and ubiquitous. He seemed to have an amazing facility for teaching himself the little etiquettes and habits of a sahib's life. He quashed speculation in the kitchen and the garden, and became a man of terror to the reputed widows and orphans who had sucked the milk of parasitism through the gate that opened on the lane. He had begun to learn the lingo, and to modify his Thames-mud slang. To Burnell he was like a dog, a mother, and a slave, but if there was devotion in his eyes it was devotion that watched jealously the temper of its god.

Burnell was aware of this watchfulness in the man's eyes, this eternal question at the back of them, but he did not ask himself what it meant. He may have suspected that West's love was a jealous love, but its jealousy was

more subtle and far less primitive than he imagined. This derelict blackguard had come under the spell. He thought Burnell a superman, but behind all his hero-worship was a fierce dread of being disillusioned, of finding that this man was no better than himself. A fallen idol seemed to spell ruin, even some act of violence.

"You've got ter prove it, you gentleman. Lord, I love yer, but I think I could kill yer if yer let me down."

There were many things in his hero that astonished Bob West. Burnell never got drunk; he had no affairs with women; he never lost his temper. And yet there was fire in him, an anger that was held below the surface. To West these virtues were negative and unsensational; he had a desire to see his hero in action; he painted boyish and highly coloured pictures of Burnell holding off hundreds of black men, giving the last drink of water in his water-bottle to some friend, dying with his back to the wall and his face all a-shine like the face of a god. In these adventures Bob West lay and bled at

his master's feet: a faithful dog, devoted, adoring. "Good-bye, Bob." "Good-bye, sir. Meet you in 'eaven." The blond beast was utterly sentimental, yet stubbornly suspicious. He was like a savage, ready to break his god in pieces if it failed him.

Months went by; the blond beast had consented to accept a small salary. The time of Burnell's leave was drawing near, and the woman of his thoughts smiled at him from his desk.

"Would you like a month in England, West?"

"I could do with it, sir."

"Be ready to pack."

Those were the days before the English became responsible for Egypt, and when plagues fell upon the land the Oriental mind lifted up its hands and crying "It is the will of God," did nothing. The hot weather had come and there were rumours abroad. West became aware of a new seriousness in the eyes of his master.

It was on the Sunday before he left for England that Burnell went to dine at the house of his chief. He found Sir Lucas and his wife and a dozen friends sitting in the garden under a sycamore tree. The English roses were still in bloom though the bougainvillæa on the house had dropped its cloak of purple. Banksia roses covered the hedges, and the flower beds were very gay with stocks and nasturtiums. The gardeners had been busy with the dew of the morning fresh upon it.

These English looked grave, and Burnell sensed bad news. He had left the Consulate in the morning, and had been watching West packing for England. He was standing by Lady Herriot's chair talking to James the engineer, when his chief passed him a telegram.

Burnell read it.

"We have cholera here. The authorities have shut us off. No doctor and no drugs. Can you help?—WARREN."

Burnell looked at Sir Lucas Herriot.

"From Menha?" he asked.

"Yes."

"What's to be done?"

"I have been trying to do something. There is not a doctor to be had. There is that Jew fellow Aarons, but he refuses to go. The Egyptians have

drawn a cordon round Menha and will let nobody in or out."

The conversation became general, and the women's voices sounded sympathetic and almost tragical.

"Poor Warren has his wife and children with him."

"Yes, there are about twenty Europeans."

"And Mr. Barnard and his daughter."

"The people will die like flies and no one will do anything. And if anyone tries to get into Menha the sentries may shoot him."

They went in to dinner. There were English roses on the table, and all through the meal Burnell, preoccupied and rather silent, looked at these flowers with the sad eye of a lover. He was being greatly tempted, greatly tried. In fourteen days he might be in England, sitting in some such pleasant and gracious room as this, and listening to the voice of the woman who loved him. What was Menha to him and the people in it; a dirty little mud town swarming with brown life? What Quixotic nonsense! And yet the pride of race challenged him, a tradition that he had chosen to make sacred.

After dinner he drew his chief aside.

"I shall go to Menha," he said.

"But, my dear man, you are off to England."

"That must wait. We can't leave those people without help. I can take drugs with me, and I have a certain commonsense knowledge of doctoring."

"You may never get into Menha," said Herriot.

"Yes, I shall. Bribing will do it."

The older man looked at him with grave affection.

"It is dangerous, Allan. I don't want to have to write and tell the people at home——"

"I know," said Burnell, "and I thank you. But I am going to Menha."

West was at work packing the big steamer-trunk when Burnell returned to his villa.

"You can leave that, West. I am not going to England."

West stood holding a pair of trousers. He stared.

"Not goin', sir!"

"Not yet, at any rate. Sorry to dis-

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appoint you. Something has turned up."

Bob West watched him. He saw Burnell walk to the book-shelf beside the window, and look at a photo that stood there—the photo of a woman. Burnell was not conscious of being watched, for his thoughts were very far away. He remained for half a minute looking at the woman's face as though he were speaking to her and waiting for her answer.

West did not move.

"She's chucked 'im," he thought, "damn her!"

Burnell turned away from the portrait with a slow and tranquil smile. His conception of this woman had given him his answer. "Go," her eyes had said. "Go, dear man. I am proud."

West was glaring, and biting his hog's brush moustache.

"So we ain't goin' anywhere, sir?"

Burnell looked at him.

"I am travelling up-country for a week or two. I shall want that Gladstone bag packed, West. Put in an extra drill suit and some shirts."

"And me, sir?"

"I want you to stay behind and look after the house."

West was still holding the trousers. He laid them on the table and pretended to smooth out a crease.

"Beg pardon, sir, but where are you goin'?"

"Menha."

"What for?"

Burnell glanced at him curiously.

"Business."

"There ain't no sort of danger?"

"No. Why?"

"Oh, nuffin'," said the blond beast. "I jus' wondered, that's all."

Allan Burnell left early next morning, and West carried the bag down to the carriage. They shook hands, and West heard his master tell the driver to stop at the Consulate on his way to the station. The carriage rolled away and West watched it, scratching his chin and looking like a dog that has been left behind.

About ten o'clock Smith, the porter at the Consulate, saw Bob West walk into the vestibule. Cairo had made them friends

"'E's gone, I suppose?"

"Yes, left two hours ago."

West felt in a pocket for something that was not there.

"What's 'e gone to Menha for?"

"Didn't he tell you?"

"No."

"Suppose I oughtn't to tell you, Bob."

West's blue eyes gleamed.

"Out wiv it. I thought 'e was playin' a game wiv me. What the 'ell is there at Menha?"

"Cholera."

"Gawd! And 'e's gone to help give a hand?"

"Sure."

Bob West broke into blasphemy.

"Did 'e think I'd be afraid? No, blast it, 'e ain't that sort. 'E wanted to keep me out of danger. 'Ere, Smithy, where's this ruddy hole? I'm for it."

"You'll get shot, Bob. There's a battalion of blacks strung round it, and they ain't letting anybody in."

"Blacks be jiggered. D'yer think a whole ruddy army of blacks 'ud keep me out of Menha?"

In the darkness before dawn a rifle-shot broke the stillness of the desert, and the voice of a sentry could be heard calling to the soldier next him in the circle that had been drawn round the little town of Menha. The bullet had ripped into something that was not sand, and the sentry was frightened.

"Moosa," he shouted, "I saw something crawling in the darkness, and it is dead."

"You have shot a pig," yelled his comrade.

There was silence for a moment, and then again the first man lifted up his voice.

"Moosa, it is alive. It utters strange curses; I am afraid."

"Wait for the daylight, and we will see what manner of thing it is."

The darkness grew less and less, like smoke drifting up and away into the heavens.

Two white figures drew together, with the butts of their muskets resting in the sand, and stood looking at a man lying in a little hollow in the desert. His face was all pinched and white,

but it had the proud, fierce look of some bird of prey. The man was in pain, and there was blood in the sand.

He raised a hand, and pointing, spoke in rude Arabic.

"Menha. I go there."

The Egyptians shook their heads.

The man cursed them, felt in a pocket, brought out some money, and offered it in the palm of his hand.

"Carry me to Menha, and I give you money."

The soldiers shook their heads.

Again the man cursed them.

"You black-mugged funks! See, 'ere. I'm dying. The great chief, Burnell Bey, is in Menha; I am his servant; I must speak with him before I die. You, fat man, go and bring him to me, and I give you money."

He explained himself slowly, yet with pathetic and grim patience. The soldier who had shot him seemed moved by compassion and the sight of the money. He spoke to his comrade, and marched off across the sand.

Bob West gave a little whimper of relief. He spoke to the soldier in white who stood by him.

"Shove a little sand under my 'ead, my son. I want to see Menha."

The Egyptian understood. He made a pillow of sand under the Englishman's head, raising it so that he could look towards the town of Menha where Burnell Bey was fighting the plague. Bob West saw a white mosque flashing in the sunlight. He lay and smiled, though every now and again the skin of his forehead wrinkled with pain.

Presently a little crowd came out of that arch of shadow where a gate opened in the town wall; and from it appeared the tall white figure of an Englishman. Bob West's eyes lit up, the pale and anxious eyes of a man who waited to die. He smiled. He raised a hand and pointed.

"The white man," he said; "in as has no dirt on his soul."

Burnell walked fast, so fast that the Egyptian soldier had to trot. In a little while he was kneeling beside Bob West, with a face that was as soft as a woman's.

"Why, West, how did it happen?"

The dying man's eyes seemed full of blue light.

"Funny world, ain't it? Fancy me bein' played by a black, and dyin' out 'ere! I was comin' to give you a 'and, sir."

Burnell was greatly moved.

"Where are you hit, Bob? You are not going to die."

West smiled at him.

"My number's up, but I ain't grouching. I can feel m' inside slippin' away, sir, but I 'eld on to it till you came. And why? Because I hated yer, and because I loved yer, but I didn't hate you any more now."

Burnell held his hand.

"Did you hate me, West? I have never had anything but goodness from you. But why?"

West looked at the Egyptians.

"Tell them niggers to go. I want to die quiet with you sittin' by me."

Burnell spoke to the soldiers, and moving away they sat down on the sand.

"Lord love me, but my eyes are growin' dim. Sit down—close—where I can see your face. No—I ain't afraid."

He looked steadily at Burnell, and his voice grew husky.

"Seems years since you picked me up as a drunk in Alex. Lord, how I loved yer and how I hated yer! You white toff! I used to ask myself: 'Is 'e the goods?' I'd never struck a sahib before and I couldn't be sure that the great stuff in you was real. But when you chucked that 'oliday and came here, I knew, Lord, but I knew. An' I loved yer, and I praised my bloomin' God for the white man that's you."

Burnell bowed his head. He was humbled.

"I—too—praise God," he said, "for the man whose hands I hold."

But West had spoken, and the soul of him was slipping into deep water. He lay very still, smiling up at the blue sky with the eyes of a child. And Burnell half-knelt, half-sat by him, holding this blackguard's hands.

Suddenly West's eyes lit up. He turned on his side and towards Burnell.

"Say, mister, I'm a white man too?"

"By God, you are."

And Bob West lay back and died.

The Wander Spirit

By Warwick Deeping

" . . . He told himself that he had no business to be bored, that he was a fool to be wanting to rush about the world. Marriage anchored people. . . ."



HEY stood hand in hand on the great lawn between the beech woods, and looked down on Vine Court and over the forest towards the sea.

They had been married three months, and had spent their honeymoon yachting in the Baltic. Yesterday they had come back to their English home, full of a conscious pride in it and in each other, still sensuously in love, and the best friends in the world.

"Isn't that good—isn't it splendid!"

Bryan Trent was ten years older than his wife. He had spent his life hunting animals and adventures in all parts of the world. And then there had struck across his life the vision of a woman and a home, with glimpses of leisurely indolence and a stately tranquillity that seemed so satisfying because it was so new. He was a little tired of his own restlessness. The solid things had escaped him, and this English house and landscape were so beautiful and permanent.

"I think we might plant some willows round the lake."

"Yes. And there ought to be a cutting through the wood on that hill. We should see the Hermit's Moor, and more of the sea."

He stood at gaze, and she watched him with eyes that were very wise and very proud. He was tall and leanly built, with intense blue eyes in a brown face,

an aristocrat, a man of the wilds, impetuous, yet with all the staying power of a man who has lived cleanly. In a way she matched him. Her brown eyes could fill with a delightful audacity. Her colour deepened quickly; there was a certain rebellious crispness in her hair.

"I don't think I shall ever wander again."

"No?"

His eyes came round to her face.

"Everything is so good here. And you. Something has tamed me."

She laughed and answered the pressure of his hand.

"The landscape is better than I am, Bryan."

"Nonsense."

"More permanent. Still, you may find all sorts of unexplored wildernesses—in a woman."

"I think I know you, dear heart. That's what makes me feel so abominably happy. It's a new feeling, a feeling of security; no more loneliness—"

He drew her close and kissed her, and then stood again at gaze, as though his serenity spread itself over the summer valley at his feet.

But Lorna Trent's eyes were looking at the future and not at the present. In many ways this man of hers was as innocent as a child. His ignorance of women was delightful; he was such a clean creature, and yet his very innocence was dangerous and fascinating in its uncertainties. He talked as though they were standing on the threshold of the Golden Age.

She knew that she was humouring him. Her intuition ran months in

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advance of his idealism. The very impermanence of his past life had made him absurdly sure of his sudden sense of permanence. He talked like a mild, sleek, tame civilian. His contentment was adorable, but she guessed that it would not last.

She did not want it to last.

Men grow dull when they grow fat. She was all for movement, and she wanted to keep his love.

"I suppose we ought to have a little golf course, Lorna?"

"Men like it."

"And we'll put more trout in that pool. What about that room of yours; is it just what you want?"

"It's perfect, dear."

"I think white and rose suit you."

They didn't in the least. Her temperament needed much more subtle and ardent colours.

A man who never changes never learns, and Bryan Trent learnt much in a year. Yet he was not conscious of accumulating knowledge in any leisurely, scholarly way; his new experiences lay heavy within him, like a mass of undigested food; he was aware of gradual discomforts, incipient discontents.

At the end of a year Vine Court had begun to bore him, and he was guiltily shocked by the knowledge that he was bored. The quiet country life was like life in a cage. His essential adventurousness had reasserted itself; he had a craving for a moment of real danger, one of those tense experiences that make a man's loins tingle and his heart beat with a snap.

But Lorna?

She seemed serene, happy, unsuspecting, half child, half woman. They talked patter to each other, were absurd and playful, and full of plans for the making of water gardens and a new tennis court, and the rearing of more pheasants. They played golf together, and

went out to multifarious dinner parties. Trent had a rifle range constructed, and taught her to shoot both with rifle and revolver. She learnt to drive their new six-cylinder car. She was an adorable mate—and yet—

Trent hated himself. He was a man with a quick sense of honour and a passion for keeping faith with people. It was he who had chosen this placid, English country life; he had imposed it upon his wife; he had no doubt at all that it was all that she desired.

And so he set out to pretend, and to pretend with ferocity, that he was the most fortunate mortal on the face of the earth. His restlessness tried to express itself in social activities—activities in which Lorna shared.

They arranged village sports, got up tennis matches, hunted regularly through the winter, played golf. Vine Court was full each week-end; sometimes they shot, sometimes they improvised golf tournaments; there was mild gambling at night over billiards and bridge.

It was golf that first tricked Trent into a very human betrayal of his inward discontent. There had been week-end rivalries, and they had developed into a four-handed duel with the Trenches as partners, and a certain tame financial magnate and his wife as their opponents.

The financier's name was Wonnup. He was flabby, explanatory, and monstrously deliberate. His wife was a hard, bitter little woman, who played with leathery complacency and altogether the most amazing luck.

"We have got to beat the Wonnups to-day, Baby."

"All right, dear man."

"My blood is on it."

But golf is an absurd game, and Trent had never been able to escape from a sense of its absurdity. Smiting that little white ball, addressing oneself to it with prepos-

terous solemnity, poking it with immense care into a hole in the ground! As a serious exercise, golf did not seem worth while, and the Wonnups were detestably serious and quite self-pleased.

Trent had not the golf temperament; he could steel himself to put a bullet through the heart of a charging lion, but he would not compete with Mrs. Wonnup at putting. She was so precise, so cocksure, and whenever he was putting Trent seemed to see those big, flat feet of hers—very efficient feet for giving a solid stance. He missed putt after putt that morning.

"Three up, partner."

There was something irritating about Mrs. Wonnup's bleating challenge as they strolled to the next tee. And old Wonnup was scooping and wallowing, getting his shots away with clumsy brilliancy. Trent could do nothing right, and his scorn of the Wonnups and his scorn of his own play made him angry.

After slicing a ball nearly into the brook, he let forth full-bloodedly.

"Sorry, Baby. Of all the damned silly games! I suppose you think me a bad loser."

She looked at him with a glimmer of wicked amusement.

"No."

"Let's go and look for that ball. If that woman brings her flat feet near me I shall kill her. Good Lord! I wish——"

"What do you wish, dear man?"

"Oh! nothing. But it does seem futile to be in competition over something with a flabby fool like Wonnup, a tame bag of jelly. There's no danger——"

She laughed softly.

"Let the poor people win, Bryan. They haven't much to be proud of. Isn't Vine Court beginning to bore you just a little?"

He denied it strenuously.

"Bore me! Nonsense. It's the people—sometimes. Hallo! here's

our ball. Old Wonnup has gone ahead; I feel I'd like to have a shot at him, but it's your stroke."

She promptly chopped at the ball and missed it.

"There you are! Imagine he's a hippo, Bryan."

"Good girl."

He gave a vicious smite, and the cleek sent a skimmer that flew with devilish exactness towards the fat man who was standing waiting.

"Fore——"

Wonnup did an absurd right-about-face, and fell flat on the ground. The ball went over him.

"Sorry, Wonnup. I say—are you hurt?"

Lorna's eyes were shining.

"Oh, you mischievous devil! Go and help the poor old thing up."

This was one of the first glimpses she had of her husband's inner restlessness. Trent was a gentleman and an enthusiast, and utterly refused to confess himself beaten. They never quarrelled; Trent's manners were charming; he made a most gallant defence against the insidious advance of an inevitable boredom. He resented this crumbling of his domestic idealism, but being a generous soul, he did not blame his wife.

"It's my own fault," he reflected.

"I ought to have realised that I'm a wild, reckless brute."

And then the thought struck him.

"I wonder if I'm boring her?"

He was shocked, naively shocked.

"Oh—damn! And supposing she were to stop loving me?"

If Lorna Trent had loved her husband when she married him, she loved him the better as this comedy of pretence developed. With a meaner and more selfish man the thing might have degenerated into a fusty sort of tragedy. But Trent was too fine for that. He believed his wife to be perfectly satisfied with this English life, and he tried to play up to her contentment. He told himself that he had no business to be bored, that he was a fool to be wanting to rush about the

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world. Marriage anchored people. There was the question of children.

Once she caught him looking at maps, and his guilt was pathetic.

"Just sorting them out, Baby, and putting them away. Shan't want such things again, shall we?"

She longed to take him by the ears and playfully shake his innocent head, but the time was not ripe yet. She loved him the more, and waited.

There was much irritable energy to be worked off, and the big car had an adventurous time of it. Trent made his drives dangerous; he invented point to point dashes that would have lifted the hair off the head of the average chauffeur; but Trent went alone. Then the smash happened. It was a mild one. The car came home with the two off-side mudguards and the step torn away, the front axle bent, and two spokes of a wheel broken.

Lorna saw the car.

"Had a bit of a skid, dear, that's all."

She decided that it was enough, and that it was time that she entered the game.

Things were going on behind Trent's back. He did not know that she was riding the most vicious horse in the stable, that she was making herself a crack shot with rifle and revolver. Once when he was away for a night she trekked out into the forest and played at being a frontiersman. The smartest Boy Scout could have taught her little. She knew every bit of her own harness, could take a rifle to bits, and cook a decent meal in a couple of dixies over a wood fire.

It was necessary that Bryan should go away for two or three weeks, and she persuaded him that he ought to accept a fortnight's grouse shooting, and join a big party that was gathering for the "twelfth." He protested that he did not want to go. It was poor sport, and house-parties bored him.

"Besides—you'll be lonely, Babe."

"Oh, no; I shall survive. You

must have some leave now and again, dear man. It will do you good. A wife ought not to be exacting."

He went over to where she was sitting and kissed her.

"I don't bore you, Baby? You're quite happy?"

"Of course. I always think other women ought to envy me. You are the dearest thing in the world."

"Do you know, Kiddums, I have been wondering——"

"Well, what is the problem?"

"Wondering whether I know any thing at all about women."

She made him kneel down and put his head on her shoulder.

"Few men do, dear, but there is always the delight of learning. We are rather interesting creatures, Bryan, and worth studying. Now you go and shoot grouse, and when you come back I will begin your education."

She kissed him with impulsive tenderness.

"It is extraordinary how much I love you, old thing; it is really quite absurd!"

So Bryan Trent went to the North, a little reluctant and a little puzzled. Lorna had shown no desire to keep him at home, her suggestion that this holiday would do him good did not reconcile him with her decision.

And the "shoot" bored him. It was so tame, so organised, so utterly safe. The people in the house also bored him; there was nothing unexpected about them, though one of the women wanted Trent to flirt with her. He found himself growing more and more piqued by the quiet elusiveness of his own wife. She did not worry and fuss and show off; her eyes always had a certain mystery; he had a feeling that she was far cleverer than he was.

He refused to shoot one morning, pleading a "head"; and spent half the day lying in the heather above a tarn. His thoughts had flown south, and he was in a mood of feverish unrest.

By Warwick Deeping

Was it possible that Lorna was ceasing to love him?

If only he could get back to the old wander life, and take her with him! What glorious times they could have! What a mate she would make! But that was impossible; she was too civilised, too soft, too fond of the stately reticence of her English life; it would be absurd to expect a woman to go roughing it in the wilds. Why, her bedroom at home was full of luxurious mysteries. Paris seemed essential; a pretty woman has to cherish her complexion. But if only they could have adventured out like a couple of children exploring a strange wood! He wanted to get away from all this correctness, this time-table existence, this starching of shirts, this talking that was just noise.

Ten days in Scotland as a member of a select house-party drove him into rebellion. He invented some excuse or other, and sent his wife a wire:

"Coming home at once.—BRYAN."

About three o'clock on an August afternoon Trent arrived at Vine Court, and was met in the hall by the butler.

"Have my luggage taken up, Gage. Is Mrs. Trent in?"

"No, sir."

"Did she get my wire?"

"Yes, sir. She went out about eleven o'clock. She's left a letter for you, sir."

Trent felt his vitals grow cold, as though some tragic piece of news had shocked him. He had been brooding all the way down in the train, accusing himself of being a failure as a husband, and for the moment he glimpsed flight on Lorna's part, a disappearance that was to prepare him for some unsuspected unhappiness.

"Where is the letter, Gage?"

He put on an air of casual detachment.

"In the library, sir."

"Thanks."

But that letter of hers puzzled him still further:

"DEAR MAN (she wrote),—Come and find me. I shall be somewhere between High Beech Wood and Durland Heath. I can't tell you where. Bring a blanket and plenty of tobacco. I'm sorry, but I have taken Rip with me; you will have to ride something milder."

Trent crossed the room and kept a finger on the electric bell for fully half a minute. Gage appeared, quite unflurried.

"Sir?"

"Has Mrs. Trent been in the habit of riding Rip, Gage?"

"I believe so, sir."

"I see——"

He wished he had never bought that beast of a horse.

"Send out word to the stables, Gage; I want Firefly round at once. Put me up some sandwiches in that cavalry mess tin of mine."

"Yes, sir."

Trent went off to get into riding clothes.

The weather was set fair, and Trent rode out on Firefly with a blanket waterproof sheet and mess tin strapped to the saddle. He had a head-rope with him, and his pockets bulged with tobacco, matches, an electric torch, clasp knife, and a candle. Firefly had not travelled so briskly for a very long time. Trent kept her on the high road till he reached the grassy lane that climbed to the High Beech Wood, a towering green hill piling itself against the blue of the sky. He rode through the wood, following the main ride that brought him out on the edge of Durland Heath. This heathland, all purple, rolled southwards for two miles till it touched the pine woods down by Sir Pope Ponsonby's park at Merrow Thicket. There was not a wilder bit of country in the neighbourhood; such a thing as a cottage did not exist.

The Wander Spirit

Trent began to search Durland Heath, following the tracks, and working to and fro with methodical determination. There was not a living thing to be seen. Here and there a barrow rose above the broad level of the heather and a few thickets of young firs broke the stretch of purple.

He had ridden for an hour before he thought of the old quarry. It lay to the south, not a mile from Sir Pope's ring fence, and Trent made for it, obeying a sudden flash of intuition. His watch told him that it was nearly six o'clock, and anxiety was making him irritable.

"What the devil!"

A grass path led into the quarry, whose walls were a tangle of brambles, briars, heather and broom. The centre was a patch of turf where gipsies camped at times, and one could always be sure of finding the black scar of a fire. Trent, riding up the little ravine that led into the quarry, reined in Firefly suddenly, for he had made one of the great discoveries of his life.

The picture was nothing more than that of a little encampment, with a sleeping-tent made of a waterproof sheet stretched over three bamboos; a fire burning, an aluminium cooker steaming over it. Lorna was sitting by the fire, throwing on dead wood, stick by stick, from a pile at her side. She wore blue puttees under her brown tweed riding skirt, a little shooting hat that was effective without being ugly, a brown jersey coat, and, what was more suggestive, a leather bandolier. Rip was cropping grass at the end of his head-rope, and raising his head to look with unabated wonder at the woman and the fire.

It was Rip who, by whinneying excitedly, challenged the coming of Bryan Trent.

"Baby! What on earth——"

She jumped up with flushing face and eyes that filled with light.

"So you have found me!"

"A pretty game of hide and seek!"

I had the fright of my life when I heard you had gone out on Rip."

"Rip is quite pleased with me—now. So you have found me, dear man—the real me!"

He dismounted, and would have kissed her, but she held back provokingly.

"How do you like our little tent, Bryan? And I am getting supper ready. Rip will want watering. You might take the horses down to the pool."

There was a queer glitter of excitement in Trent's eyes.

"Baby, what's all this? Is it a game, or——"

"I've been learning it. Tie Firefly up to that thorn tree, and come and look. What do you think of my saddle—here; the leather's well kept, isn't it? That tent I made myself; the bamboos are cut into sections, and the whole thing rolls up into those straps. I rather pride myself on my outfit."

He glanced from one thing to another, and his trained eye found much to wonder at, much to admire. His hands seconded his eyes. He examined the saddle and bridle she had brought with her, the contents of the pack that lay in the little tent, the way she had slung the pot over the fire.

"I have got our supper to cook, dear man."

"Supper!"

"There will be soup. I am going to grill a steak. I may even contrive a savoury."

He had tethered Firefly to a tree, and he came back to Lorna with grave, questioning eyes.

"What does all this mean, Baby?"

She was kneeling by the fire.

"I have been learning such a lot, dear man, quietly, without your realising it. I can groom my own horse, keep my own harness and rifle, cook over a gipsy fire, ride at night by the stars. I knew that some day you would want to wander again."

Trent went a guilty red.

By Warwick Deeping

"Lorna!"

"Oh—yes—I knew; you have been a dear, but I am not a fool, Bryan. The wander spirit is in your blood, and I think I have not a little of it—in mine."

He bent over her suddenly, one hand under her chin.

"Baby, let me look into your eyes. You have learnt all this—because——"

"Because I wanted to be a mate for you, because I am rather fond of you, Bryan. And I'm tired of these tame people. I want to break out, I want to be a wild child—full of mischief."

"Baby, you couldn't rough it!"

"Oh, yes, I could. My complexion might suffer just a little, but I'm a very healthy young woman."

Trent picked her up in his arms and kissed her.

"You adorable thing. I never thought this possible. But why shouldn't it be possible—why not? Lord, the places we could see together—the colour, the beauty, the wildness."

She laughed up at him.

"I want to break out, Bryan. Let's do something quite outrageous to-night; let's put ourselves outside orderliness and convention."

His spirit caught at the inspiration.

"Yes—by Jove!—let's. What shall it be—housebreaking or arson?"

"Put me down, Bryan. There is my cooking to be done. Try and think of some great piece of harmless mischief."

He kissed her and set her down.

"Here's a pretty wife, inviting her husband to spoil his neighbours. Who is it to be—old Sir Pope?"

"That curmudgeon! Splendid! Of all the pompous and detestable old wretches! And the way he has spoilt the lives of those poor girls of his."

"Then Sir Pope is the victim. I have an idea, Babe. Those cattle of his—in the park."

She knelt and looked up at him with sparkling eyes.

"Well?"

"You remember how the old beast hoards his gardens—wouldn't let the Roxford people have their Red Cross show there?"

"Yes. He said he wouldn't have a lot of human cattle trampling his lawns."

"Supposing we have a cattle drive and turn all the beasts in the park into his garden?"

"Immense! Bryan, I love you, you wicked old devil!"

She had to be kissed for such rare praise.

"We were in danger of growing dull, dear."

"Well, the danger is past."

What happened that night in Sir Pope Ponsonby's park none of his people ever knew. But there were great bellowings and commotions, and a blundering to and fro of puzzled beasts. The keeper of the garden lodge poked his head out of the window about one in the morning to see what all the noise portended. The lodge gates were open, and before the man could cover his nakedness and get below to close them, a cantering mass of cattle poured through and dispersed itself into the darkness.

Trent and his wife escaped from the park through the gap that Trent had cut in the fence. They had enjoyed their mischief like a couple of wild boys.

"What a jest!"

"You were as good as any cowboy, Bryan."

"I was a stockman for six months. By George, you can ride, Baby!"

"Do you think so?"

He brought Firefly close to Rip and put his arm over his wife's shoulders.

"What a mate I have won! I didn't think there was such a woman in the world, dear."

"There never is, dear man. But you will have to try and keep in love with me—even if I ruin my complexion!"

WARWICK DEEPING.

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Mellisanda

By Warwick Deeping

"... She seemed to be watching and waiting for something to happen, and I had a feeling that she was in danger, and counted on herself and her own courage and not at all on me. The lover in me was challenged, even though I could not quarrel with her aloofness."



I WAS sitting under the ilexes of the Pincian Gardens in Rome watching a nursemaid and three children playing ball. To a tired man on a month's sick leave the picture of those three youngsters and a graceful girl laughing and flitting to and fro under the sun-streaked shadows of the trees was like music on the first warm spring day after a long winter. I could not help noticing the girl, because of the clear, pale beauty of her face, her liveness of limb, and her ardent joy in life.

It was a quiet part of the Pincian Hill, where the high wall rises above the Borghese Gardens, and one sees little but green tree-tops and blue sky. There were three men leaning against the parapet of the wall with their backs towards me, gossiping in a quiet, confidential way. One of them was a huge, sprawling fellow, with spectacles spread across his flat white face. The second was undersized and red-haired; the third a very handsome man with a hook nose and a black beard.

I think that I hardly should have noticed these men but for the fact that the fat fellow appeared to be annoyed by the children and the nurse-girl.

"Catch, Gemma."

"Gemma, Gemma, throw it to me."

The ball flew often in the direction of these three men, and once it rolled so close to them that the girl could

have touched the big man when she stooped to pick it up. And I saw his head swing round savagely like the head of an angry boar.

The girl was away again, running and laughing back at the children.

"Quick, Trice—catch."

The game went on, and the men continued their talking, but I could see that the big man was restless. Their voices reached me as a discordant murmur, but I could not distinguish the language in which they spoke. It was obvious that the nearness of an English officer in uniform did not interest them in the least, for the fat man had given me one stare—and honoured me with a permanent picture of his bulging back.

Presently they strolled away in the direction of the steps leading to the Piazza del Popolo, and they were still in sight when the nurse-girl gathered her trio together and followed in the same direction.

I dined at my hotel that night—the Hotel Firenze—and I was smoking in a far corner of the lounge when Holt of the Embassy came in. I had known Holt at Cambridge and had looked him up the day before. He wandered over and sat down by me, lit a cigar, and looked round the place with those coldly amused eyes of his and his air of serene detachment.

We chatted for a while on Rome, the war, and where I had planned to spend the rest of my leave. I told him I was going to Florence and then on to St. Flaviano on the Italian Riviera. Holt watched me and smiled.

"Why not delete Florence," he

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said; "it won't suit you, Temperley."

"Why not? Besides, I'm ashamed to say——"

"Oh, if you still have the Baedeker frenzy in you, go by all means and get cured. Live people are so much more interesting to watch. Do you care for gossip?"

"Your irrelevancy always was very pertinent, Holt."

"Thanks. Someone made a catch in Rome to-day."

"Oh?"

"It might interest you"—he dropped his voice and edged his chair nearer—"the secret police, I might call them the Allied police, laid their hands on half a dozen mild Russians, Orloffs and Popofffs and Tinkalinksis, and what not. Part of the subterranean crowd that helped to—well, you can infer the rest."

I was vastly interested, but Holt would not tell me any more.

"I can't go into details, my dear chap. I thought you would like something to go with your cigar. Yes, no one discovered that the scoundrels were Russians till to-day. And two of the biggest rogues got away. Rather a pity."

I knew that the news was far more important than his casual air would have suggested, for as all the world knows German secret agents have done us more damage in this war than many a big offensive.

Two days later I moved on to Florence and put up at a quiet hotel in that most wonderful city. I was not in search of excitement; one gets enough of that in the line, and it pleased me to wander about as an appreciative idler, ignoring picture galleries and museums, contenting myself with life. The Arno always fascinated me; so did the Boboli Gardens and Fiesole; and I took a childish delight in strolling to and fro across the Ponte Vecchio.

I was crossing the narrow bridge on my third morning in Florence when I noticed a tall woman looking into one of the little jewellery shops. She was fashionably and exquisitely

dressed in some dark stuff, and the hat she was wearing must have been created in Paris, but it was her face that surprised me, for it was the face of the Roman maid whom I had watched playing ball with those children in the Pincian Gardens. The likeness was extraordinary. There was the same smooth pallor, the same straight nose and forehead, the same delicately rounded chin. I remembered the curve of the nostril, the blue-black depth of the eyes.

She turned and walked on as I loitered outside the same shop, and I followed her across the bridge. And again the likeness challenged me. She seemed to drift along as lightly as that Roman girl had flitted under the ilex trees; there was the same flowing, easy movement, the same rather proud carriage of the head. I could have sworn that the nursemaid of the Pincian Gardens and this woman of fashion were one and the same.

I must confess I followed her till she disappeared into one of the bigger hotels, but I carried my curiosity no farther.

"What a damned fool you are," said the prosaic voice of the plain citizen within me.

I did not guess then how soon the "plain citizen" within me was to be confounded.

At the end of the week I travelled north to St. Flaviano where the silver-grey olives and the dusky pines come down to meet the pellucid blue of the sea. St. Flaviano was a little white town with red roofs strung along the curve of a bay, a pleasant, sunny, indolent place. I had known it in peace time, but now the casino and most of the hotels were hospitals, though the Splendide on the Genoa road could boast of a good season. The Splendide was famous for its gardens. It was not so blatant and atrocious as its name suggested, but held itself quietly aloof under the impending shadows of a wood of magnificent pines.

I had always loved the walk to Quiridale by the mule track and

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paths along the coast, and I tried it my second morning. Nothing could have been more solitary and sweetly wild than this rock country poised between the blues of sea and sky. There was a villa or cottage here and there, the home of some placid, sunburnt soul who lived on his olives, and his maize, and his few vines grown on the century-old terraces that had been scraped out of the hillside.

One wild spot had always lured me where a little inlet of the sea cut deep into the land, and one could sit under brooding pine trees and throw stones into the clean water a hundred feet below. A rough path led down to this cove or bay, a path half hidden by arbutus shrubs. I had often bathed from the little stony beach, as though I had been a dweller on a desert island.

I had turned aside down the path leading to the bay when I saw a girl sitting on one of the flat rocks on the beach below. She was wearing a red petticoat and a white chemise, and a black skirt and a blue bodice lay on another rock beside her. Her feet were naked, and she was drying a mass of black hair with a towel, sitting in the full sunlight and basking in it after her bathe.

The whole picture was refreshingly original. I had never known of an Italian peasant girl going down to bathe in the sea, and this girl must have been swimming, to judge by her hair. The sea was not mine for the moment, so I lay down in the centre of a clump of pines close to the path and waited for her to finish her toilet and leave the beach to me.

Presently I heard her coming up the path, and I lay there with my eyes closed pretending to be asleep. She was humming a song to herself, and I opened my eyes to get a glimpse of her as she went by.

"Good morning, Signore."

She had stopped and was staring straight at me, and I suppose I must have stared back very foolishly at her, for I saw before me the nurse-girl of the Pincian Gardens and the

woman of the world of the Ponte Vecchio at Florence. The dress had changed, but the face was the same.

I sat up and saluted her rather awkwardly.

"Good morning, Signora."

She continued to stand there and look at me intently, and I saw no more than a handsome peasant girl with dark eyes and white teeth.

"The signora was asleep. I am afraid I disturbed him."

She spoke as an Italian, and I had to answer her as best I could.

"It is nothing. One should not be asleep in this beautiful country."

"The signora is English, and an officer. I have seen the English at St. Flaviano. We are very grateful for the brave soldiers who have come to help Italy."

She smiled at me and I smiled back, but I was puzzling my head all the while, wondering whether I was the victim of a series of extraordinary coincidences, or whether this was the same woman in a different dress. And those eyes of hers had a very magical effect on me.

I saw her hand slip into the pocket of her skirt.

"I think I have seen you before, Colonel."

Another shock! She had spoken in very good English, quite casually. I stood up. One did not sit and talk in the presence of such a woman.

"It is possible," I said.

"Please do not move, Colonel, or I may have to use this pistol of mine."

She withdrew her hand from the pocket of her skirt, and I saw that it held an automatic pistol.

"And please do not imagine that I cannot shoot."

I laughed—I could not help it—the quiet laugh of a man wholeheartedly amused. The incident was so unexpected, so refreshing. But my lady remained very serious, with her eyes regarding me intently.

"You think you have seen me before. Will you please tell me when?"

I told her.

Mellisanda

"At Rome in the Pincian Gardens—where you appeared as a nursemaid. Again a few days ago on the Ponte Vecchio at Florence. And here——"

"Thank you. Now will you tell me your name, where you have come from, and what you are doing wandering about Italy."

"Certainly—if you wish it. My name is Roger Temperley—the Honourable Roger Temperley, and I am in command of a certain English regiment here in Italy. I happen to be on a month's sick leave, and in moving about Italy I have been following my own whims, nothing more."

She let me see the muzzle of her pistol.

"Thank you. I must ask you to convince me of your identity. If you have any letters or papers on you, please throw them across to me. And please remember that I am very much in earnest."

I can't remember feeling very much afraid of her pistol. Her eyes were far more potent; there was an indefinable something about her that made me realise that she was far from being what she seemed. I was wearing a silver chain identity disc on my wrist, and I unfastened it and threw it across to her.

"Perhaps that will satisfy you."

She picked it up, examined it, and then tossed it back.

"Perhaps. If you are not an English officer you are a very good imitation. In fact, I think you are genuine, Colonel Temperley; but still I do not understand how you have followed me, and at present I have reason to mistrust such people."

"It was pure coincidence," I said.

"Very extraordinary."

"Life is extraordinary. Besides, Signora, have I not an equal right to be a little astonished by your transformations. I do not ask you any questions; I have no right to do so, and I do not carry a pistol."

She smiled slightly

"And yet——"

"You cannot expect me to be so inhuman as not to be a little—interested, to use a very cold word."

She smiled again, looking at me very intently.

"Yes, you are wondering what I am—anarchist, international spy, or something even more dubious. Is it not so?"

I met her eyes, and we examined each other with a new curiosity.

"I think nothing of the kind," I said; "I may be hopelessly mystified, but I remember the tale of the great lady amusing herself by masquerading as a beggar maid."

I saw that my vague challenge had touched her.

"Do I play the part so poorly?"

"You are playing no part now."

Her eyes looked past me up at the blue sky beyond the pines.

"True. And this war has made life even stranger than it used to be. Three years ago who would have dreamed! What heroism, what treachery, what corruption, what cowardice!"

There was passion in her voice. She seemed deeply stirred by memories, and by the consciousness of things that provoked her scorn. And suddenly her eyes flashed back to mine.

"You Englishman, what do you know of man and woman, of the baseness and the beauty in the same human body. In England you hide what is real. You are so practical, so sensible, so stupid. You do not know what it is to see your country in the power of dupes and lunatics, a festering mass of ignorance and folly, corrupting the courage and honour of half the world. You have never had your trusted servant spit in your face: a good girl drunk with the words of fools. And why am I here—in this dress?"

She laughed and spread her arms and let them drop to her side.

"How crude of me to talk like this, and to an English soldier. Undisciplined, is not that the word? Well, I am keeping you from bathing."

By Warwick Deeping

She seemed to harden herself of a sudden, to grow proud and reticent, while I was still thrilling with the scorn and the sadness and the passion in her voice.

"I think we English are learning to face realities."

She looked at me with those strange eyes of hers.

"Realities. Of a sort yes. But life—and what life means—no. I come from another country, a world within a world."

"Russia?"

She gave me a fierce, keen glance.

"Well, why should I deny it? But if you are a man of honour, Colonel Temperley, you will tell no tales of me. I am here that I may live, though why one should love life—God knows."

She turned suddenly and walked on up the path without another glance or word, and I stood there looking after her, a man caught in an enchantment, not knowing what to think or do.

I did not follow her, and I did not bathe in the cove, but walked back to St. Flaviano in a mood that was prophetic.

I confess that I took the track to Quiridale again next morning, but I saw nothing of my mystery woman, though I spent half the day wandering along the cliff paths. I made one discovery, and that was the existence of an old, battered, yellow-faced villa that hid itself amongst pines and cypresses and olives on a sunny slope above my bathing-place. I scouted round the place, and saw an old fellow hoeing weeds in a patch of flowering beans; but I held aloof and did not question him. And yet I had a feeling that my mystery woman was hidden there, and that I should meet her again if I had patience.

I rose very early next morning, made myself a cup of coffee, put some biscuits in my pocket, and set off into the wilds. My early rising brought me luck, for I intercepted my mystery woman on the

path that led from the little cove to the yellow villa.

She met me quite calmly, with just the glimmer of a smile.

"You are earlier to-day, Colonel Temperley."

"And I have my reward."

"Then you bear no malice for being browbeaten by a woman."

"I found it rather attractive."

She laughed softly and looked at me in that proud way of hers.

"I may tell you that I am a woman of the world. Yes, you were right yesterday in concluding that I am living at that old villa—the Villa Ercole. *Il padrone* is a very shrewd old gentleman who can hold his tongue."

I stood directly in front of her, closing the path.

"I wish you would tell me who you are," I said.

"Why do you wish it?"

"Because I do not want to trust to another coincidence. It could not very well happen a fourth time."

She coloured slightly and seemed to hesitate.

"If I tell you a part of it."

"I am not a usurer; I can be grateful."

Her eyes searched mine.

"Is this just an adventure to you, Colonel Temperley?"

That made me angry and our talk ceased to be mere fencing.

"I have been too keen a soldier all my life to bother much about women. If you want me to be grossly and crudely frank with you——"

"No, no—I forbid it. And so you wish me to tell you my name."

"You know mine."

"But I do not bargain."

"Nor do I."

She laughed.

"Mad Englishman. Well, supposing I give you part of it. They christened me Mellisanda, which has a mediæval flavour. But in Russia——"

I knew her from that moment, and I remembered where I had seen her face before, in many an illus-

Mellisanda

trated paper of the day. And for the moment I could find nothing to say to her, being too astonished—and a little abashed.

"Princess," I began.

She laughed and made a motion with her hands.

"So you know me. But that is all nothing now; the superstitious splendours have vanished. I am just a woman who has stepped down into the world of men and women, and I do not ask to be anything else. And life has fascinated me very much; I would not go back again to a great white prison. A masquerade! Perhaps even my masquerading in Italy has had its purpose. And it is something to be able to hate."

"And whom do you hate?" I asked her.

She answered with a kind of solemnity.

"The Prussians."

I spent the greater part of the next three days in the neighbourhood of the Villa Ercole. A man of thirty-five can love very fiercely when the great occasion comes to him, and we Temperleys were always men of stout fibre. And my lady was kind to me, but with a kindness that piqued me not a little. She let me talk to her, even took me into the wild garden of the Villa Ercole and told me something of Russia and her life. But there was a barrier beyond which I was not allowed to pass. She seemed to be watching and waiting for something to happen, and I had a feeling that she was in danger, and counted on herself and her own courage and not at all on me. The lover in me was challenged, even though I could not quarrel with her aloofness. What right had I to thrust myself into her life? I had to win that right as a man and as a lover.

If I had believed her to be in danger, I was soon taught to realise the truth of that belief. It was on the road just below the Hotel Splendide that I rediscovered the

fat man of the Pincian Gardens. He was slogging along up the hill, using a heavy walking-stick made out of the stem of a vine, his soft black hat crowded down over his bulging spectacles. The man had the look of a professor, short sighted, greasy haired and cumbersome, a very familiar sort of figure in any European town.

I had taken to carrying a revolver during the last few days, and I put my hand to my side to make sure I had it on me. The professor plodded on up the Quiridale road, and I followed him in the distance, very much his enemy behind his bulging back.

Sure enough he hesitated when he reached the spot where the cliff path left the road, and sniffed about like a dog on a scent. I held back behind some trees, and watched him. He took the path, and I followed.

The fellow showed extraordinary activity for so fat a man. He floundered along at a great pace, and once or twice I had to trot to keep him in view. Presently he betrayed an extreme caution that compelled me to be very careful in turn; but I could flatter myself that I knew all the paths and the ground about the Villa Ercole far better than he did, and so I had him fooled. He held on along the track that branched down towards the sea and the little cove where Mellisanda bathed, and his very choosing of that path intensified my mistrust of him and made me suspect that someone else had been playing the spy.

I stalked him through the scrub and scattered pines, and his final move made me set my teeth, for he made straight for the beach path, took a look round him, and then squatted down behind the arbutus trees. I had gone to earth, but when I took my next glimpse of him he was crouching and swinging that heavy stick of his as though measuring his distance for some treacherous blow. I felt that

my princess was coming up that path, and that he was waiting for her.

Luckily that fat rogue was so intent on the work before him that he did not remember to guard his rear. I crawled through the little wood of pine trees, and the ground was hard and earthy here; had it been stony and loose I should never have got so near him as I did. And I lay there, covering his bulging back with my revolver, ready to shoot him if he made a move.

Then I heard a stone rattle down the path. The professor heard it too. His stick went up. I could see that he meant to crash through the bushes and strike down my lady as she passed. I rested the barrel of my revolver on my left wrist, took the risk of my life, and fired.

The first shot only wounded him. He plunged round with a sort of roar, saw me rising and charged. My second caught him full in the chest. His hands shot up, his knees gave under him, and he went down like an ox.

I was bending over the man when I heard Mellisanda's voice.

"You have killed him."

I looked at her and nodded.

"Let me see his face."

She spoke in a whisper, and I turned the dead man over so that she might see him.

"He was waiting there behind the bushes ready to strike," I said. "I shot him on the chance that the blow would be meant for you."

"On the chance?"

"Yes—just that."

She gave me a look that I shall always remember.

"The mad Englishman. Yes, and you have saved my life."

Suddenly she stood with her head raised, listening. Her eyes held mine a moment, and then glanced at the dead man.

"But this! And it is you——"

The steep hillside seemed absolutely solitary and silent.

"There is danger for both of us."

I remembered the cliff below and the sea washing against the rocks. And without more words I took the dead man by the heels, dragged him down the hillside, and thrust him over the cliff edge into the sea. His stick was still gripped in his right hand, and he carried it with him over the cliff.

I found Mellisanda leaning against one of the fir trees, listening. She watched me as I approached her, and there was a new look in her eyes.

"Come."

She led the way to the Villa Ercole, and I, a soldier and a slayer of men, felt a new exultation crying in me as I followed. I had shed blood for this woman, and the blood pact would bind us.

She led me through the old gateway and up the weed-grown steps to the villa. Tall cypresses threw their shadows across us. Up yonder among the olive trees we saw *il padrone* hoeing weeds.

Mellisanda turned aside along the terrace where the sun blazed upon the flat stones and the yellow walls of the villa. There was a brick belvedere at one end shaded by a flat-topped pine. She entered the belvedere, sat down on the stone bench, and signed to me to sit down beside her.

"Do you know whom you have killed?"

"No."

"A Russian—yes, a professed revolutionary, but one of the cleverest of the Prussian agents. It was I—once a great lady, now a woman of the people—who ended his career and those of his associates in Italy. The others were taken, but he escaped. I hid myself, but I felt that he would find me—seek his revenge."

We looked at each other in the half-light of that shadowy recess.

"Have I proved myself?" I asked her.

She stretched out a hand to me and I kissed it.

"You wild man!" she said

Mellisanda

gravely. "I did not know the English could be so reckless."

We talked for a while, and the more I considered the whole business, the less I liked her remaining in Italy. That fat fellow's death would not end it; they might never find his body, but they would suspect what had happened. There might be more of these nameless scoundrels watching the place.

"One thing is obvious," I said to her, "you will not be safe in Italy, and not so safe as I could wish in France. Now in England—"

She smiled at me.

"I see. But it is not so easy to get to England—when one has been masquerading."

"I think it could be made quite easy," I said. "Have you any other clothes?"

"Yes, the clothes you saw in Florence."

"I have ten more days' leave. I can wire to my people for the necessary papers and an extension. They will send a dispatch rider back."

"You mean you would take me to England?"

"Of course."

"What a compromising situation. Besides, how would you describe me?"

"Nothing could be easier. You could travel to England as my wife."

It was like one of those old romances one used to revel in as a youngster: of a chance meeting, a fight, a rescue, two days of intimate and splendid adventure with love waiting at the end thereof. I think my recklessness and my ardour carried her away. She had loved me when I had shot that man without troubling to be precise and careful. She loved me when I suggested carrying her off by storm.

"But—but shall I then still be masquerading?"

I caught her hands.

"The choice is with you, and I am your very devoted servant, if it is forbidden me to love so very great a lady."

She did not draw her hands away.

"Great! That is all in the past. I am just a woman, and a poor one so far as worldly wealth counts in the world."

"Then I may carry you off to England?"

"I do not think I can hold out against so masterful a man."

I did not leave her all that day, and when dusk came I made her go in and change her peasant's clothes. I myself saw the *padrone* and paid the shrewd old soul for the little that she owed him, with something added as a retainer of his goodwill. I had thought out my plans. Lady Joan Beardsley, an old friend of mine, was in charge of an English hospital at St. Flaviano, and I had called on her two days ago. I determined to take my princess to Lady Joan, tell her the truth, and ask her to play the fairy godmother.

So in the soft dusk we went down the winding path, hand in hand, with the stars glinting through the olive trees, and the sea a stretch of purple. I had my revolver ready, but no one challenged us, and we came down into St. Flaviano as the moon topped the hills.

Just by the flight of steps, where two or three big ilexes made a deep shadow close to one of the old gateways, we stopped and kissed like two children.

"I have always dreamed of being won in this way," she said to me.

"Thank God," I answered her, "that I was chosen to do the winning."

WARWICK DEERING.



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THE BUNCH OF VIOLETS

By WARWICK DEEPING

ROGER GASCOYNE always travelled light. He boarded the boat at Trieste with nothing but a pair of old saddle-bags slung over his shoulder, and a travel-worn kit-bag that had wandered from Terra del Fuego to Riga.

The *Pannonia* slugged her way out into the Adriatic, her green and white hull badly in need of paint, and the gold lettering in her bow and poop less resplendent than her name. She carried a greasy and cosmopolitan crowd. The captain was an Austrian, the chief engineer a Greek, the crew were half Italian, the passengers anything from Salonica to Suez.

Gascoyne was not affected by crowds, even though they suggested fleas and garlic. He had seen too much of the world; he was too fond of a cold bath, his brown, whipcord body was supremely strong and wholesome. He wandered about the *Pannonia*, looking at anything and everybody with those cool blue and adventurous eyes of his, and then settled himself in a chair on the first-class deck, his feet on his kit-bag, and a pipe stuck in the corner of his mouth.

There were very few first-class passengers on the *Pannonia*, and so far as Gascoyne was concerned they did not assume any human importance. He was going no farther than Isola Bella, and these people were the mere passing shadows of a dozen hours. He pulled out a pocket volume of Kipling's tales, and forgot the blue level of the Adriatic.

Then something attracted his attention. A couple of yards away on his right a woman was seated in a deck-chair. She was reading a German novel, and her face was hidden by the book, yet Gascoyne became aware of the fact that she kept looking at him over the top of the cover. She seemed restless, displeased with something, and he had a feeling that that something was himself. More than once he met her eyes full stare. They were very curious eyes, shallow, hard, and of the colour of jade. She had a red complexion, a beaked nose, and a mass of tawny hair rolled high over her forehead.

Two men were leaning over the rail on the opposite side of the deck—the thick-set and rather clumsily-built type that one associates with Middle Europe. They were

conspicuous; they might have been waiters, commercial travellers, police officials in plain clothes, seedy aristocrats, university professors! Gascoyne had not observed them. They belonged to the sort of world that he despised.

"Schmidt!"

One of the men turned about and came across the deck. It was the woman with the jade-coloured eyes and the pompadour ruff who had called him.

He bowed to her, bending from the hips. "Fraulein?"

She spoke to him in German in a quick and metallic voice, and she spoke so rapidly that Gascoyne caught only an occasional word. There was something about "*Englander—nicht rauchen.*" The sallow man bowed again to the lady, and came and stood over Gascoyne's chair.

"Your pipe is offensive to madam," he said in English.

Gascoyne gave him an upward, smiling, undisconcerted look.

"I beg the lady's pardon. I will move my chair."

He transferred himself to the other side of the deck, and in doing so he happened to see Herr Schmidt dismissed with an imperious little jerk of the hand. That gesture interested him. It was so autocratic, so sure of being obeyed. It did not belong to the ordinary common woman who brow-beats her common men with tongue and temper.

Gascoyne sat and studied her with the discretion of a hunter and a man of the world. He seemed to have seen her face before; the autocratic lines of it were familiar, it was the kind of face one sees in photos of the royal families of Europe. He imagined that she was an Austrian, very rich, an aristocrat, and that the man Schmidt was her courier.

Suddenly he felt himself touched on the shoulder.

"It is not agreeable to the lady—that you stare so much."

Gascoyne put his head back and laughed. His laughter was rich, quiet, spontaneous, and without anger. The insolence of the thing had tickled him.

"I beg your pardon," he said.

He stood and looked squarely into the fellow's eyes. Now there are some men who can issue an ultimatum without utter-

ing a word or moving a muscle, and Gascoyne was that sort of man. His eyes said: "Your impertinence may be amusing, but I suggest that you put it in your pocket and go home." The Austrian's eyes blinked and eluded Gascoyne's grip. He gave a sulky shrug and drifted away.

Gascoyne sat down again in his chair.

"I think I have it," he said to himself, "but why—the *Pannonia*? Why not the archducal yacht?"

My lady of the eyes of jade did not condescend to lunch in the saloon. She disappeared into one of the deck cabins, and Gascoyne saw her no more. He spent the afternoon dozing in the sunshine, and woke up to find the island of Isola Bella floating like a great amethyst on the blue of the sea.

Gascoyne stood leaning over the rail, and watched the island unfold its details to him. He saw the great central spur of its wooded islands black with a forest of pines, he saw the chestnut groves on the lower slopes, the scattered villas with their splendid cypresses, the vineyards and terraces, the shelf of pasture and arable land between the hills and the sea. Porto Pino, the island's solitary townlet, showed white beyond a blue headland, the tall campanile of its church hanging like a slender thread against the midnight pines. The sea changed from sapphire to turquoise as the *Pannonia* steamed in towards the coast.

The steamer did not put in at Porto Pino. Boats came out from the harbour and took off the few passengers who were bound for Isola Bella. Gascoyne was making his way to the steps, with an Italian sailor carrying his kit-bag, when he saw the woman of the jade-coloured eyes ahead of him. She was giving orders to the man Schmidt, and pointing to a couple of leather bags that lay on the deck. She was landing at Porto Pino.

Gascoyne was conscious of surprise, a twinge of curiosity. He knew something of the island's history, but he would never have prophesied that this woman was bound for it, nor could he imagine why she was landing here. Porto Pino had but one hotel, the Albergo Rosso. Two or three plutocrats had built villas there during the last two years. The population consisted of peasants and a few fishermen, and the whole of the island outside the boundaries of Porto Pino had belonged to a certain Austrian archduke. Financial gossip had put it about that Isola Bella was for sale, and Gascoyne's trip from Trieste was connected with this sale. He had come to prospect. A geologist's hammer, a pair of sharp eyes, and a shrewd experience that had hunted and surveyed in a dozen odd corners of the earth, had made him a "free-lance" to be respected even by cosmopolitan Jews.

Gascoyne's boat and the boat that carried the Austrian and her people raced each other into the harbour of Porto Pino, but Gascoyne was the first to land on the quay. While he was paying the boatmen, an amiable giant, with the head and throat of a Hercules, and wearing a faded blue coat with brass buttons, possessed himself of the Englishman's luggage.

"Albergo Rosso, signore?"

Gascoyne smiled and nodded.

"Which way?"

"Take the road to the Piazza Savona, signore. I will see to the luggage."

Gascoyne walked on.

The Albergo Rosso stood at the far end of the piazza, like a box turned on end, pigeon-holed with windows, and painted a dirty pink. A pergola gave shade to the lower storey, and also to a few marble-topped tables and green chairs where the albergo's patrons could drink their vermouth or their coffee. A fat man in a frock coat was standing in the doorway, a man with the head of an amiable walrus and legs that were like the legs of an elephant.

As Gascoyne drew towards the Albergo Rosso this man stared at him with a stare that became more fixed and more suggestive of astonishment. His eyes seemed to grow more prominent, stalked like the black eyes of a lobster. And suddenly he began to laugh, laughter being his chief means of self-expression, the music of his emotions.

He waddled out into the sunlight.

"Strike me blue, eet's Meester Gascoyne!"

The Englishman's eyes gave a flash of surprise and of pleasure.

"Well, I'm hanged!" he said, and again "Well, I'm hanged!"

They shook hands with fervour, their eyes full of the laughter of old memories.

"Oriani—what the devil are you doing here? It's a long way from Quito."

The Italian indicated the albergo with a dramatic sweep of the arm.

"I grow homesick at Quito. I bring my money home with me and look for a likely place."

"Extraordinary! But Isola Bella?"

"It is a very good island, signore. Each year more rich Tadeschi will come here."

"I see. And I'm to be your guest here? It's a strange world."

Oriani patted him on the shoulder, and then roared for someone in the albergo.

"Anita, come here! Here is that English gentleman who fought two half-castes with his walking-stick and saved my life. Have I not described it a hundred times? Send Paula to put clean sheets in the big room over the garden."

For some moments Gascoyne lived in a whirlwind of Italian enthusiasm. He was shaking hands with a swarthy little woman

whose eyes glittered like two friendly bits of black glass. People came out and stared at him—a waiter, a man in slippers and a blue apron, a small boy, two women in striped petticoats. He had seen too much of the world to be embarrassed, but this notoriety was not quite what he wanted.

He managed to get Oriani aside.

"Signor Sandro, I'm on business here."

"Business!"

Gascoyne made one or two quick gestures with his hands. The Italian nodded; his eyes twinkled.

"Tourist?" he asked.

"Say—artist, a silly Englishman who paints pictures."

"Gia, gia. I take you."

They were still talking at the door of the Albergo Rosso when the porter in the blue coat appeared with Gascoyne's luggage. The big fellow's good-natured face was wrinkled up with swarthy indignation. He set the baggage down, spat, waved his hands, and sensing a sympathetic audience proceeded to explode.

"The luggage is yours, signore? There is no mistake?"

"It is mine all right."

He gave the porter his *buona mano*, and thanked him as one gentleman thanks another. The porter pulled off his hat, swept the ground with it, smiled, and addressed himself to Oriani.

"The English signore is *galantuomo*, but just now I have been called a thief, *padrone*. Grr—these Tadeschi! I meet the boat, the signore gives me his luggage and leaves it with me like a gentleman. I see a lady, two other men, bags and valises. I lay hold of a bag, thinking she will be coming to our house, and hey presto! I am spoken to like a dog! Truly, if I had followed my inclination I should have thrown the bag into the sea."

Oriani smoothed his wrath, patting Ugo's shoulder with a fat and fatherly hand.

"There, there, Ugo, everyone knows that you are honest. And who was the lady?"

"I do not know, *padrone*, and I do not care. The name on the bag was Winkler. Her eyes were the green eyes of a cat. She goes to Count Apponyi's villa."

Gascoyne was listening, and sympathizing with Ugo, having himself experienced the serene insolence of this rather mysterious person who used the name of Winkler. He had his own ideas as to her identity, but he was very far from realizing how strange and tragic a part she was to play in the greatest adventure of his life. Oriani took him to his room, a cool and spacious room overlooking the garden with its vine trellises, roses, fig trees and cypresses, and there Gascoyne had a bath. The bath arrived like some triumphal votive offering, the whole Albergo assisting in its arrival, incited to

humour this piece of eccentricity by Oriani's intimate and affectionate knowledge of the English male. A swarthy old woman even offered to scrub him! Gascoyne eluded that ordeal. At seven he was diving in the little *sala di pranzo*, and drinking a bottle of *Lachryma Christi*. At eight o'clock he sat smoking his pipe and gossiping with Oriani on a bench in the garden. They talked about South America, Italy, England, until their talk came round to Isola Bella itself, and Gascoyne kept it there. The island had had a romance, a romance that still lingered.

It soon became obvious to Gascoyne that Oriani was showing caution in speaking of this affair.

"The thing is not yet dead," he observed, "and a snake that still lives is dangerous."

"You are speaking of the woman?"

"God forbid!" said the Italian with some emotion. "Is she not my countrywoman, beautiful but unfortunate?"

He lit a little black cigar, and its end glowed red in the dusk.

"You do not know how it all happened?"

"I know next to nothing," said the Englishman. "Only that gossip will have it that the Archduke Ferdinand—"

Oriani made a gesture with his cigar.

"Please, no names. Isola Bella still belongs to him, and these eccentric princes make bad enemies. But if you are inquisitive I will tell you all I know."

"I am always inquisitive."

Oriani moved closer so that his knee touched Gascoyne's.

"Isolda Benci began her career at Milan. She was just a pretty girl with an old father to keep, and she was a good girl, too, and clever. Well, as you know, she made a name for herself on the stage, and although she was an Italian she had a great reception at Vienna. That is where—*he first saw her.*"

"You mean—the archduke?"

"Ssst! That title brings bad luck! Half the world knows that he had been living a dissipated life; the man had genius, but it was going to the devil. In Vienna he fell in love with Isolda, and wanted to make her his mistress, but Isolda was not that sort of woman. I suppose she loved him, too, in a way; anyhow, her power over him was so great that she rescued him from his parasites and his gutter life; she made a man of him, and he married her."

"Married her!"

"Yes. Of course, the great people refused to recognize it. It was then that he bought his island and built the Casa Felice up there in the woods. That was three years ago. They came and lived here, a wild and simple sort of life, with one old woman to cook and clean. Isolda gave up her career for this man, and brought him

back to health and happiness. They ran wild like a couple of children. He grew a beard and let his hair grow long; he cut the wood and pruned the trees, and worked in the garden. He never appeared in Porto Pino, but the day came when he did come down into the town. Some children saw him and mocked him, because of his queer clothes and his hair. He went straight to Vecchi the barber's and asked for a looking-glass; it appears that they had no looking-glasses at the Casa Felice. Vecchi told me how he gave the man the glass, and that he seemed shocked and angry; he sat down at once and ordered Vecchi to shave him and to cut his hair. I believe, signore, that was the beginning of the end. He was a very vain man, and all his family are a little mad; he could not bear to be laughed at, and I suppose he thought that Isolda had made a fool of him. The life up there went on for a while, and then—quite suddenly—he deserted her and went back to Vienna. I dare say they put pressure on him. I happen to know that a great state official visited the island under an assumed name. He stayed in my house. I recognized him, because I had seen his photo in one of the illustrated papers."

His cigar had gone out. He relit it, and sat smoking in silence, his hands on his knees.

"And the woman?" Gascoyne asked him.

"She is still there."

"Living alone?"

Oriani nodded.

"Why doesn't she go back to the theatre?"

"Ah! there—you ask me a question! Women are queer, and Isolda is not an ordinary woman. She may be ambitious, and yet they say she refused a title. It may be pride, signore, the pride of the woman who has been humiliated. It may be fear."

"Fear! Why fear?"

Gascoyne's voice was sharp, almost fierce.

"Well, you see, she may be in the way. It is possible that she has been threatened, warned that she must stay in the island where no one really matters. The old Emperor—"

He paused, for Gascoyne had gripped his knee.

"Man, that's it!"

Oriani looked at him in the dusk.

"What has excited you, signore?"

"Oh, nothing," and Gascoyne knocked out his pipe. "A coincidence, that's all. I seem to have remembered a face. I suppose you haven't a photo of the—man?"

"There is one hanging on the wall in the salon, signore."

"I should like to look at it."

They went in. The salon was empty, and Oriani pointed to a framed photograph

hanging behind the door. The room was lit by a hanging lamp, and Gascoyne struck a match and held it close to the picture.

"You will observe, signore," said the Italian, "that many Austrians come here, and it looks well for me to have that photograph."

"Quite so," and Gascoyne struck another match.

His face looked grim.

"Yes, the likeness is remarkable," he said.

"To whom?"

"To someone I have met. I should like to have a look at that house of romance. How far is it from here?"

"An hour's walk. You climb the mule path behind the church. It takes you over Monte Maria into the Pino valley. On the next hill and standing high up among the pines you will see a little white house."

"Thanks, Oriani," said the Englishman, "and now I think I will go to bed."

II

GASCOYNE was away next morning while Porto Pino was still stretching its arms and yawning. He had the wanderer's love of being abroad before his fellows, and Oriani had stuffed his haversack with bread, the wings of a chicken, a bottle of red wine and some apples. The Englishman had slipped his "automatic" into the hip-pocket of his breeches; he was no "gunman" in the vulgar sense, but the carrying of a weapon had become a habit with him in the wild corners of the world where he had scratched the savage soil in search of mineral treasure. His geological hammer was mixed up with his lunch, and he carried a pocket-lens in lieu of a watch.

Gascoyne took the mule path that zig-zagged behind the church, and it carried him over Monte Maria and dropped him into the Pino valley, where crops of beans were in flower and scenting the morning air. Here, too, were orchards all white in the lap of spring, and stretches of green maize and lupin. Westwards he saw the central ridge of Isola Bella rising to a grey razor-edge. The slopes were a smother of pines, with oaks and chestnuts on the lower hills and edging the valleys. On the ridge nearest to him Gascoyne saw a little point of whiteness shining on the black cushion of the pine woods. He guessed it to be the Casa Felice, the home of Isolda the unfortunate.

He bore that way. His business lay up yonder among the rocks, rocks that had never been smitten by an expert's hammer, and the Casa Felice could be surveyed as he passed. Its romance had interested him. It possessed that immemorial and tragic sadness that clings to the memories of

Blaise and Abelard, Beatrice and Dante, Tristan and Isolt. Gascoyne might be a free-lance, a John Hawkwood who rode in search of modern commercial adventure, but he was also that very rare creature—a romantic gentleman. He passed through the groves of oak and chestnut, pausing to pick a few wild violets and to tuck them in the band of his hat. Then the pine woods swallowed him up, great solemn woods that went whispering towards the distant blue. The smell of them was sweet and clear and pungent. The roots of the old trees made him think of a thousand black snakes asleep in some enchanted wood.

Presently the pines cleared before him, and he saw a grove of olives laced against the sky, and three tall cypresses towering against the blue. A whiteness flashed beyond the trees. It was the Casa Felice. As Gascoyne walked on he saw that the place was surrounded by a terrace faced with a rough, cyclopean wall, and he had a glimpse of roses in bloom, a tangle of flowering shrubs, blue irises blazing at the top of a grey rock. The house seemed very silent; he heard no voices. The green shutters were open, and a brilliant red gull trailed from one of the windows.

He went past a gate and steps in the terrace wall, and along a grass walk shaded by olives. On his right there was a terrace planted with loquat trees, peaches, and apples. Close to the path and half buried in the grass lay a great boulder, looking like some black beast that was pushing its broad back through the soil. Gascoyne turned aside to examine it. He fancied that he noticed a crystalline veining that glinted in the sunlight, and unfastening the flap of his haversack he took out his hammer and struck the rock a sharp, ringing blow.

Gascoyne was examining the fractured surface when a sound like the breaking of a piece of dead wood made him turn his head. He found that he was not alone. A woman was standing on the terrace above him, a woman in a white dress. She carried a basket in her hand.

She was looking down at him, and the first thing that struck Gascoyne about her was the beauty of her eyes. They were large and dark and unusually brilliant, and the soul of her looked out of them with the watching sadness of captivity. Standing there, tall and slight in the shadows thrown by the trees, she seemed to be waiting for something that was fated to happen. She expected it; she had expected it for so long a time that she had almost ceased to be afraid.

She was looking at his hat.

Gascoyne had forgotten the violets he had tucked into it, and his reaction to her stare was a quick lifting of that same hat. He realized that his surprise had

left him staring at her rather rudely, also that he was trespassing in the olive groves of the Casa Felice.

"I beg your pardon," he said in Italian. And then she astonished him—and Gascoyne was not easily astonished.

"I see, signore, that you have brought me my death sentence. Was there any message sent with it?"

She came to the edge of the terrace, holding out a hand and looking at the violets.

"May I have them? Yes—I understand quite well what they mean. We had agreed that if ever he sent me a bunch of wild violets—"

She was quite calm, unbelievably calm, and in that moment of tragedy something very singular happened to Roger Gascoyne. He looked up at her, and he understood.

"I beg your pardon," he said again, "but I think you are mistaking me for someone else."

"Oh?"

"Am I speaking to the Signora Isolda?"

She nodded, her eyes looking steadily at his face. Gascoyne smiled and, holding his hat in front of him, pointed to the violets.

"I picked these when I was coming through the woods. I am not an Austrian, but an Englishman. I am afraid that I have trespassed here in more ways than one."

The coincidence of his coming to her with these violets in his hat had made her spread her arms with impulsive fatalism to take the expected blow. She stood looking at him with a dusky bewilderment of face and eyes, realizing that he must think her mad. Or was it possible that he knew? She hesitated, and was about to turn away.

Suddenly she heard him speaking.

"It has happened," he said. "Fate must have meant it to happen. We had better accept the fact."

She was very conscious of him standing there bareheaded and looking up at her with a pair of intense blue eyes.

"But who are you?"

"An Englishman. I came here to explore."

"To explore!"

Her voice sounded incredulous.

"Let me explain," he said. "And supposing you sit down on the grass; it is quite dry."

She gave him a half frightened and questioning glance, sensitive, gently proud, a glance that made him feel that there was nothing of the actress left in her, and but little of the woman of the world. Her tragedy had left her naked, strangely and beautifully simple, a woman whose pride had survived her disillusionment, the pride of a quiet fatalism.

She sat down on the grass at the edge of the terrace, but Gascoyne remained

standing. And now her eyes were on a level with his. He noticed that her basket was full of fir-cones that she had gathered.

He smiled.

"That's right. Things happen strangely in this world. When I landed here last night I met a man who was my friend in Quito; I had not seen him for five years. And this morning I happen to pick a few violets and trespass near your house."

She said nothing. Her eyes watched him and waited, and Gascoyne had a feeling that he was being weighed in the balance, judged as he had never been judged before. He had blundered broad-shouldered upon her tragedy, and already an inward voice was asserting that it was impossible for him to turn back.

He talked fast yet easily.

"You wish to know why I have come to Isola Bella? Well, I have spent all my life as a hunter and explorer, a commercial adventurer, a mining expert, a writer of books. Someone suggested that there were certain mineral ores to be found on this island, and I came quietly to have a look for myself. Last night I had a chat with my old friend Oriani of the Albergo Rosso. You may know him by name?"

She nodded.

"We gossiped a little. I admit it. He roused my curiosity, a curiosity that was neither vulgar nor impertinent. I confess that I wandered this way because I wanted to get a glimpse of the Casa Felice, but I did not expect to see you."

He smiled at her with challenging frankness, but her eyes remained sombre and defensive. She was still a little bewildered by the conviction that he knew her history, that she had betrayed yet more of it to this utter stranger, that he had suddenly opened the door of her life, and that he was standing there like a man not meaning to go. It was quite absurd!

She made a movement as though to rise, drawing up her feet and resting the palm of her right hand on the grass.

"So—nothing is sacred! A little inquisitiveness stirred in you, signora! Perhaps it is satisfied?"

He looked at her steadily.

"No. It has become more than mere inquisitiveness. Please—stay here."

Her eyes tried to rebuff him, and failed.

"Is not all this a little impertinent?"

"But why? You said to me just now, signora, that nothing is sacred. On the contrary, it is because some things are so very sacred that I have the hardihood to stand here and speak to you as though we had known each other for many years. You can live with some people for a quarter of a century, and they remain comparative strangers. Nothing big and human happens to break up the crust of convention. But the very first words you spoke to me—"

Her face seemed to grow white and strained.

"You mean?"

"Such words cannot be recalled. They were spoken under a misconception; they were drawn from you by some great emotion. Certainly I had no right to be conscious of that emotion, but I couldn't help it."

She sat and stared at him.

"No," she said, "perhaps not." And then: "But because I betrayed something to you have I granted you the right to stand there and question me?"

He nodded gravely.

"That charge has to be answered. I'll answer it by saying that I am a man with the impulses of a man who is not quite a mere beast. I suppose I saw things in your eyes that called to the brother in me. Do you understand that? Try and look at it calmly."

She echoed the word almost derisively.

"Calmly!"

"Yes, calmly. You mistook me for someone else—an Austrian. You thought that I had brought you some fatal message, a message that you have been expecting. It is possible that I have guessed what that message should have been. I might have taken off my hat to you, apologized and walked on. Well, I didn't."

He looked straight into her eyes, head up, a little challenging.

"And shall I tell you why? Because I have always been ready to turn and fight when I have heard a man or a child or an animal utter a cry of pain. Is that rhetoric or mock heroism? Well, if it is I don't care. And now—you know."

She turned her head away and sat pulling at the grass, her eyelids quivering a little, her breath coming and going more rapidly. This wild man had roused in her a quite extraordinary sense of pain. His abrupt and intimate interference angered her perhaps because it had made her feel emotions that she had been striving to kill. She had been dead, and he was making her alive.

"You must have had many adventures," she said haughtily, "if you always behave like this."

By way of answering her he established himself on the edge of the terrace and stared at the blue sky beyond the olives.

"A good many. But not adventures like this. In fact, I don't think I should call this an adventure. My life has been too busy for sentimental episodes."

She glanced at him quickly.

"Indeed! Then, why—?"

He turned and met her eyes.

"Just because it has happened. I don't doubt that you despise men; flabby, sentimental, selfish animals! Defying the lightning one moment, breaking their promises and hiding under the bed the

next. Quite so. You can begin by despising me."

She was frowning, perplexed.

"No, I don't understand you, but I don't

was new to her—and yet as old as time. This man revered women. She felt herself struggling against some mysterious yet inevitable onrush of circumstances,



"Not bad, my friend, not bad! but I think those legs are the legs of Mr. Schmidt"

think I despise you. I may have ceased to believe in anybody."

"Because one man proved himself a mass of treachery, spoilt vanity, and cowardice?"

This time her dark eyes blazed.

"How dare you say that?"

"Is it a lie?"

"No; it is true. But you——"

"You will forgive me for saying it. I want the ground cleared. You know quite well that you are in danger."

"And if I am?"

"Well, I am here now. That makes a difference."

He looked at her with grave assurance, and there was something in his eyes that

events that happened like the bursting of a cloud or a storm at sea. They had known each other less than an hour, and yet this Englishman was falling in love with her. It was ridiculous, altogether preposterous!

And then, with a sort of reckless gesture, she threw aside her reserve.

"Very well. Supposing I admit that I thought that you had brought me my death sentence, what then?"

"I infer that some other person may bring it."

"It is possible. I had made up my mind to refuse humiliation."

"I shall quarrel rather badly with that other person."

And suddenly she began to laugh, but it was the laugh of despair and of tears.

"What an extraordinary man!"

He was smiling.

"I feel supremely natural. Most people are so full of little cowardices that they can never be natural. Having lived a wild sort of life I know that nothing is surprising in the jungle or the desert."

She made a helpless, questioning movement of the hands.

"Well, what next?"

"I landed on Isola Bella to prospect for minerals, and I have found something else. My business lies right here. I have an idea that someone will call on you with a bunch of violets."

He saw the pupils of her eyes dilate, and he leant towards her.

"Tell me, signora, do you recognize the person I am about to describe? A woman with a great ruff of yellow hair, a nose like the beak of a bird of prey, eyes the colour of green glass. An insolent woman bred in some imperial palace, serene and arrogant."

She bowed her head and nodded.

"Yes. But where have you seen her?"

"I travelled on the same boat. She landed on the island last night."

For a moment she sat staring at nothing and pulling at the grass.

"My friend," she said in a voice that was almost inaudible, "how little the world has changed! Sometimes a woman is still asked to choose between shame and poison."

Gascoyne passed the morning lying behind a rock on the edge of the pine woods overlooking the Pino valley. He knew that if his suspicions were correct he might expect to see somebody cross the valley and take the path to the Casa Felice. That somebody might be a woman or a man. He lay low and waited, keeping his eyes on the point where the mule-path crossed the ridge of Monte Maria, for it was visible there as a whitish streak, and Gascoyne had keen sight. Various people passed that point; an old peasant in blue trousers leading a mule, two women carrying baskets on their heads, a boy with a sack over his shoulder. The bell-clock of Porto Pino was striking eleven when the Englishman saw a figure, a figure that did not tone with the landscape, cross the ridge of Monte Maria and descend into the valley.

Gascoyne waited twenty minutes. The figure was lost in the green growth of the valley, but presently he saw it moving in the chestnut woods below him. He was a born hunter of men and of beasts, and he snuggled down so that only his eyes and his soft gray hat were showing above the rock.

That other man climbed slowly upwards through the chestnut woods. He kept

loitering and stooping, gathering something, and into Gascoyne's nostrils the imagined scent of violets entered.

He looked grim.

A little later he had a clearer view of this picker of flowers. The man was dressed in a loose, biscuit-coloured alpaca coat, a big Panama hat, and clumsy black breeches. There was something professorial about his appearance. He wore blue goggles and a beard, had a collector's box slung over his shoulder, and carried a green butterfly net. Gascoyne could not help a grin.

"Not bad, my friend, not bad! But I think those legs are the legs of Mr. Schmidt."

He lay low behind his rock, and crept round it as the man climbed upwards and passed within twenty yards. He did not see Gascoyne, but Gascoyne had one good look at him. This spectacled entomologist carried a bunch of violets in his hand.

The Englishman let him go, and then cut away uphill and to the right. He worked round to the other side of the Casa Felice and came upon it from the west, scouting his way through an olive grove till he had a view of the house and the garden, and there he waited, leaning against the grey trunk of an olive tree, motionless and almost invisible.

The "professor" had walked leisurely up the hill. Gascoyne heard the sound of his footsteps, and saw the Panama hat bobbing along below the terrace wall. It paused at the steps and the open gate. Then the spectacles and beard appeared, followed by the green butterfly net and the brown alpaca coat. Gascoyne's hand went to his hip pocket and felt the steel butt of the pistol.

The "professor" ascended the steps and stood looking about him, just like the common, inquisitive Teutonic tourist who is quite equal to strolling into anybody's garden and sitting down to enjoy the view. A stone table stood about two yards from the top of the steps, with a couple of green chairs behind it. Gascoyne saw the man step forward with great deliberation and lay his bunch of violets on the table. Then he quickly turned about and disappeared.

Gascoyne waited, eyes and ears on the alert. It was possible that the gentleman with the blue spectacles was still hanging about the place, though he had vanished down the steps with a briskness that suggested that his responsibility had ended with the presentation of those flowers. He was too much in the thick of the affair to strike a self-conscious attitude over the romantic coincidence of his own interposition. Nor was he made that way. And then he saw Isolda's white dress and wreath of midnight hair. She came slowly round the corner of the house carrying

basket full of roses. She paused by the table, looked down, and saw that bunch of flowers.

Her suddenly motionless figure gave Gascoyne an impression of tragic and fatal dismay. For some seconds she did not move; her stillness was the stillness of one standing in a trance. Then he saw her approach the table, stretch out a hand and touch the flowers with the tips of her long fingers.

She recoiled as though stung, and that dramatic shrinking brought Gascoyne from behind his tree. He called to her as he came down through the olives towards the garden.

"Signora!"

She turned swiftly, like an animal expecting an attack, saw him and stood still. Her large eyes looked black and tragic in her white face. She did not speak.

Gascoyne sprang lightly down into the garden.

"Wait!"

He ran down the steps, and returned at the end of two minutes, breathless, his blue eyes very fierce in his brown face. He had seen the man with the blue spectacles looting it through the chestnut woods on his way back to Porto Pino.

Isolda was still standing. He gave one glance at her face, and picking up one of the garden chairs placed it in the shade of the house.

"Please, sit down."

She obeyed him, but he noticed that her eyes were still fixed on the bunch of violets. Then she turned to him in silence.

"You see!" her eyes seemed to say.

He nodded, and his mouth was both grim and compassionate.

"I saw them placed on that table, and the man who left them there is on his way back to Porto Pino. Now then——"

She gave a quick and warning cry, and stretched out a hand.

"Oh, be careful!"

Gascoyne went to the table and touched the flowers; he did not pick up the bunch, but separated the flower heads carefully with his fingers. His whole face seemed to harden, for hidden in the middle of the bunch was a little glass phial, and in it a yellowish liquid.

Gascoyne picked up the violets by the stems, carried them to one of the flower-beds, and throwing the bunch on the ground crushed it into the soil with his heel as though he were crushing the head of a snake.

He turned to Isolda.

"That's that! You know what it was?"

She nodded.

"A suggestion—and the means with which to carry out the suggestion."

He walked to and fro with a cold anger that was dangerous.

"So that is the game. I take it that

you are in the great lady's way, and that a certain poor, unstable coward has surrendered to imperial pressure. Were you—— Forgive me for asking."

She understood, and she answered him calmly and at once:

"Yes, we were married. Of course, they insisted on calling it a morganatic marriage, but I realize now that they wish to be rid of me. Thy know that I know. I was given a choice."

She covered her face with her hands, and Gascoyne stood over her and touched her gently on the shoulder.

"Tell me. Can you?"

"Either I was to disgrace myself with some other man, so that he would never want to come back to me—as if I could want him to come back to me!"

"Or?"

"I was to be offered—what you saw in that bunch of flowers."

Gascoyne's eyes flared.

"The devils! But now I know where I am. One moment."

He stood thinking, and she watched him with eyes that were beginning to wonder.

"Have you anyone here with you?"

"Yes, Paula, my old servant. She went down early to Porto Pino to the market."

"Is she to be trusted?"

"I think so."

"Now, supposing you shut yourself up in your room and tell Paula not to disturb you, these people will come sneaking up to see what has happened. They will see the flowers gone, and no Isolda. They will question the old woman. She will tell them that you have shut yourself up in your room and given her orders not to disturb you. They will probably think that you have taken, or mean to take, the stuff that was hidden in those flowers."

She nodded.

"That will give me time. I want to go down to Porto Pino and see if there is a boat to be had. I must get you away to Italy."

Her dark eyes were still a little incredulous, gently astonished.

"But, my friend, why should you do this for me?"

He smiled down at her.

"Perhaps because I have found some thing in this island."

She looked at the ground with a moment's delightful confusion.

"It is very strange. But for you—it may be dangerous."

"I like danger."

"But—one moment. There is something that I must say to you, and you may not understand it. I must see this woman alone before I go."

"Why?"

"For the sake of my pride. She, in her arrogance, thinks that I am just a vulgar woman, a little Italian actress whom she

can kill and throw into the gutter. I shall show her that I am not like that. I shall defy her. My words can hurt her more than hers can hurt me."

Gascoyne threw up his head!

"By God! and so you shall! That pride of yours pleases me. But I make one stipulation. I must be in the house."

They looked into each other's eyes.

"Why do you wish that?"

"Child," he said, "this woman would have you killed with as little compunction as she would order the shooting of a dog. She is a mass of hereditary arrogance and tyranny. Some of these so-called notable women have always been like that. Their egotism is ferocious and without restraint. No, I must be here!"

She held out a hand.

"And I, signore, do not even know your name!"

"Gascoyne—Roger Gascoyne. Perhaps you will know it better later on! And now I must return to Porto Pino. Oriani will help me with the boat. Also, I must get a glimpse of this villa where madam is staying. You will go to your room and stay there till I come back?"

"You wish it?"

"Of course. I shall be here before night; I shall come in the dusk. The password shall be 'Roma.' You'll remember?"

She gave him both her hands.

"Oh, my friend, all this seems unbelievable! On the stage I have played at romance."

"This—is—romance, not a play."

IV

GASCOYNE'S long legs hunted the "professor" over Monte Maria, and though the man in the brown coat had had half an hour's start of him he was overtaken by the Englishman on the mule-path leading down to Porto Pino.

Gascoyne made a shadow-play of it, following Herr Schmidt through the vineyards and gardeus with the intention of satisfying himself as to the creature's destination. This Austrian toddled along at an easy pace, diverging now and again to examine a flower or an insect, living up to his "character" with the thoroughness of a man of method. He was quite unaware of those blue eyes covering him, or that he was no more than a squat and clumsy beetle being watched by a swift-darting shriek. For Gascoyne was angry. This little Austrian was a poisonous snake whose head needed smashing with a stick, an evil creature who had been hatched in the thick of the shabby and cynical intrigues of an imperial court.

Moreover, a very wonderful thing had happened to Roger Gascoyne. He had come to Isola Bella in search of "marketable

ores," and he had found the first woman of mystery, the woman who possessed that subtle something that all other women had lacked. Gascoyne, like all big men who have lived big and spacious lives, was a little shy of the word "love." It had come to smell too much of suburban drawing rooms, Piccadilly Circus, and passion in print. He had seen so much shabby excitement masquerading as the "grand passion" in the seedy streets and byways of great cities, so many respectable compromises dressed in their sentiment, so much crude beastliness, that when that strange and inevitable woman appeared he was almost sceptical, a little incredulous. But it was the mood of a moment. There is a divine intuition in the best of us that cries out with exultation, "It is she!" Gascoyne heard that cry, and became the great lover of an hour.

He found himself following the "professor" along a narrow lane at the back of the town of Porto Pino, with the rocky slopes of Monte Maria on the one side, and high old yellow houses on the other. The lane ascended and disappeared like a strip of carpet under the iron gates of a bombastic and glaringly white villa. This luxury-house of Count Apponyi's seemed to swell out of the hillside like some flocculent fungoid growth. Its central dome and the cupolas of its corners were painted sky blue. The roof was of glazed green tiles, and under the broad eaves ran a cornice of rosettes and guilloches splashed in bright colours. The house sat on a great stone-faced platform, up which the road zig-zagged like the ramp up the mound of a Babylonian temple. The place was barbaric, yet monstrously modern. It suggested to Gascoyne a crude plaster of Paris model made by some precocious and megalomaniac small boy.

He passed under the shadow of a house and watched the "professor's" squat figure moving slowly up the lane. It passed through the iron gates and disappeared, but later Gascoyne had a further glimpse of its Panama hat ascending the zig-zags of the road. Again he disappeared, and once more the white hat came into view above the top of the wall that edged the rocky platform on which the villa stood. There was a red and white striped awning here carried on an iron frame. Gascoyne saw the little figure remove its hat and make a suggestive movement with a hand that held a little dab of whiteness. Herr Schmidt was hot, and he was mopping his forehead.

It appeared to Gascoyne that the "professor" was talking to someone who was seated under the red and white awning. He fancied that he could distinguish polite little flexions of Schmidt's figure, deferential bobbings of the head. Gascoyne could visualize the yellow-haired woman, reclining in a lounge-chair and listening

to the creature's description of his pilgrimage to the Casa Felice.

The devil of pure mischief stirred in the Englishman. He drew a leather wallet from the breast pocket of his coat and extracted several visiting-cards. He carried a selection of these cards about with him, their inscriptions varying to suit the different phases of his life. "Mr. Roger Gascoyne, Athantis Club, Pall Mall," "Mr. Roger Gascoyne, Mining Expert, Pomfret House, Old Broad Street, London, E.C." He chose the "mining expert" card, slipped it into the side pocket of his coat, marched up the road and passed through the iron gates.

His audacity wished to assure itself of the connexion between the man who had left the bunch of violets at the Casa Felice and the woman with the jade-coloured eyes. On reaching the terrace in front of the villa he found himself in a formal garden of little artificial lawns, roses, palm trees, and beds of cineraria that looked like plush cushions dotted about the grass. His inference had been correct. My lady was lying in a long chair under the red and white awning, a book on her lap, and Herr Schmidt still standing respectfully at her side.

Gascoyne stepped on to the grass. They had neither seen him nor heard his footsteps, for he happened to have rubber soles to his boots, and he was able to get quite close to the two and to stand for a moment hidden by a palm. My Lady Disdain was speaking in German, and Gascoyne knew enough of the language to understand her.

"It shall be this evening. We will go up there in the twilight. If she has not used the little present we sent her we shall find her alone, for Mosso got hold of the old woman this morning, and will keep her out of the way. You will take a can of petrol with you. Heinz has been down to the harbour and made sure that the Trieste boat calls to-morrow."

Gascoyne made a grimace. He retreated a few steps, keeping his eyes on the two under the awning until he reached one of the stone paths between the squares of grass. He glanced at the villa. The sun-blinds were down and most of the shutters closed; it was unlikely that he had been seen by anyone in the house.

He took out his cigarette case, dropped it with a clang upon the path, and stooping to pick it up pretended to take his visiting-card from it. Then he walked coolly forward to the archduchess and the man. They stared at him in astonishment. His unexpectedness won him a moment's grace.

He took off his hat and spoke in Italian. "You will excuse me, but may I assume myself to be in the presence of Count Apponyi?"

He bowed to Herr Schmidt, smiled, and offered his card.

Schmidt gasped and gave a sort of negative grunt, but it was the archduchess who controlled the situation. She sat up. She looked Gascoyne over with her hard, imperial eyes, and stretched out her hand for the card.

Schmidt handed it to her, embarrassed, bowing. She glanced at the card and then dropped it on the ground.

"Will you explain to this person," she said in German, "that he should apply to the servants in the house."

Schmidt bowed.

"And you will instruct the porter to tell him that Count Apponyi is not at home. I see it is that English fool who dared to light a pipe near me on the boat."

The "professor" turned to Gascoyne, and made a sign to him to accompany him to the villa. Gascoyne pretended to hesitate, with his eyes on the archduchess.

"Signora—"

She gave him one serene stare, opened her book, and began to read.

Schmidt led the way to the end of the terrace and, bowing stiffly, showed Gascoyne the road.

"Count Apponyi is not at home. Good morning."

"But, I beg your pardon, I am here on business, and I understood—"

Schmidt showed a certain clumsy impatience.

"I tell you, sir, the count is not on the island. Good morning."

Gascoyne smiled and bowed.

"I am much obliged to you for your politeness. May I ask when the count may be expected?"

"He is in the Sophia. Good morning."

Gascoyne bowed again with the bland air of an unsnubbable "bagman," and walked back down the lane to Porto Pino.

He went straight to the Albergo Rosso, and found Oriani sitting under the pergola overlooking the piazza, reading a week-old newspaper and sipping a glass of vermouth. The Italian was surprised to see Gascoyne back so early. He put his paper away and glanced up at him with a quizzical little smile.

"And how do you like Isola Bella, signore?"

Gascoyne winked at him, and, bending over the round table, pretended to look at Oriani's journal.

"Can I have a word with you somewhere?"

Oriani rose and, taking his glass of vermouth with him, led Gascoyne through the albergo into the garden.

"Oriani, I want you to help me."

"Has the island a secret, amico mio?"

Gascoyne dissembled. He saw no reason why he should involve this good fellow in the clearing up of an imperial scandal.

"That's so. I struck something likely up in those hills—just by a fluke, too. It's

worth trying for a reservation. Don't blab about it, Oriani. And look here, I want to get back to England in record time and pass my information to the people who hold the money. It's a gamble, of course. I suppose I can charter a boat to take me across to Italy?"

Oriani raised his eyebrows.

"You are in a great hurry? The Trieste boat calls to-morrow."

"I don't want to go by way of Trieste. I have reasons. I'm in a hurry, and I'll pay."

Oriani finished his vermouth.

"I dare say Giuseppe would take you," he said. "His boat, the *Otranto*, has an oil engine fitted in her—Porto Pino's latest sensation. I happen to know that he is going to Ancona in a day or two."

"Introduce me to Giuseppe."

"He is a friend of mine."

"So much the better."

They went down to the harbour, where the green-blue water washed the white walls of the old houses, and found the *Otranto* moored close to the pharos. Giuseppe, a big man with an enormous black beard, was busy with paint-pot and brush, adding yet more lustre to the "pride of Porto Pino." Oriani and Gascoyne went on board, and the three men sat round the wheel and smoked cigarettes.

Oriani introduced the Englishman and his benefactor and friend, and Giuseppe listened with swarthy solemnity.

"So the English signor wishes to go to Ancona?"

Gascoyne smiled at him and nodded.

"I put out the morning after to-morrow, signore."

"Make it to-morrow morning at dawn, Signor Giuseppe."

The shipmaster stared.

"But, signore, my cargo will not be complete."

"How much will you lose in freight if you sail to-morrow at dawn?"

Giuseppe watched the smoke from the end of his cigarette.

"Perhaps—two hundred lire."

"I'll pay you three hundred."

"For yourself, signore?"

"And a friend. Supposing I add another hundred for the friend?"

He took out his wallet and counted out the money in notes.

"I'll pay half now, if it is a bargain."

The big Italian looked at him curiously.

"There will be no trouble with the 'customs' officers?"

"No. I'm not stealing anything, or carrying contraband."

Gascoyne laughed. "Oriani knows me."

The innkeeper's eyes were black and a little puzzled.

"What the signor says—is," he remarked. "You can trust him."

So it was agreed between them that the

Otranto should sail at dawn, and Gascoyne and Oriani walked back to the Albergo Rosso. Gascoyne could see that the Italian had something on his mind, and when they reached the inn he took Oriani into the garden.

"My friend," he said, "I have puzzled you a little, but tell me, did not our friendship begin when I rushed in with a stick to help a stranger?"

Oriani nodded.

"It is true."

"And here on this island I have found occasion to rush in with a stick. It all happened in the flash of an eye. Do you blame me?"

He laid a hand on the Italian's shoulder, and Oriani looked him steadily in the eyes.

"Santa Maria, but you have been to the Casa Felice?"

Gascoyne nodded.

"Say nothing, know nothing, Oriani. I hope to do a good deed for myself to-night."

V

GASCOYNE repacked his baggage that afternoon and sent it down by Ugo to be shipped on board the *Otranto*. He kept nothing but his haversack and the impetuous spirit of romance. At five o'clock Oriani gave him an early supper in an arbour in the garden. The innkeeper sat with him and shared his bottle of wine, and it was obvious to Gascoyne that Oriani was excited. He was dying to ask innumerable questions, but Gascoyne told him nothing.

"My good friend," he said, "it is dangerous for a man in your position to know too much. If you are inquisitive, come down to the harbour at dawn."

"And supposing you are not there?"

"Then—it's probable that I shall be dead."

Gascoyne started at six o'clock for the Casa Felice, and half an hour's walking carried him over Monte Maria into the Pino valley. Oriani had told him of a path farther up the valley, a more lonely path than the one he had used in the morning. It led round to the north of the ridge on which the Casa Felice stood, and brought him through the pine woods on the westward side of the house. He met no one, and in the thick of the woods he stopped to examine his "automatic," and to slip a clip of cartridges into the magazine, for he was under no illusion as to the temper of the people with whom he might have to deal. He had an electric torch in his haversack, and he transferred it to the right-hand pocket of his coat. Then he pushed on through the gloom of the pine woods until he saw the white gleam of Isolda's house.

(Continued on page 111.)

In the olive grove Gascoyne paused to listen, conscious of the impetuous strangeness of the adventure and of the sudden coming of this thing called "love." He had wandered about the world for years, a restless man who had looked at women as he looked at children, liking them in his easy human way, but never so seriously as to take one for a mate. Yet here in Isola Bella a woman had put out her hand and touched his heart. It had just happened, and with the swift inevitableness of a leopard's spring.

The Casa Felice was silent; the light of the setting sun touched its red roof above the tops of the pines. There was no one to be seen, and Gascoyne sprang down into the garden and made his way round to the front of the house. All the shutters were closed save those of one of the windows on the first floor, and Gascoyne, looking up at it, whispered the password. "Carissima Roma."

Isolda came to the window and looked down at him with eyes of light.

"Ah, it is you! I am glad."

She disappeared and ran down the stairs to open the door.

"Paula has not returned."

"I know."

"But how?"

"I had the luck to overhear something. No—Paula is not false to you."

"I am glad. And—oh, my friend, I was growing a little frightened, but I am no longer afraid."

She closed the door and led the way upstairs to a little salottino very simply furnished in the Italian style. There were two doors to this room, the one that opened from the stairs, another leading into an inner room that had served as a library. Isolda had seated herself on a couch by the window. She looked up at Gascoyne with questioning and shadowy eyes.

"Well?"

"Speak softly. They will be here soon. I happen to know."

"You seem to know everything!"

"My luck," he said with a grim little smile, "but are you still determined to see this woman?"

She nodded.

"But why do you ask?"

"Because it would be so much easier for us to slip away before they come. I have arranged for a boat to leave Porto Pino at dawn to take us to Ancona."

She looked up at him with a sudden flicker of tenderness.

"But why do you do all this for me? You came here to look for minerals, and you leave without finding them. You take charge of me like a brother. Do you know that I have no money left—nothing?"

"Does that matter? Who thinks of money when something very wonderful

happens? Perhaps I have found a treasure-house here."

She gave him her hands.

"I give it up. It is all so incomprehensible! I am like a leaf carried along by the wind—by you. And yet somehow I have never felt so sure, so happy."

He bent and kissed her hands in the old, stately, tender way.

"So you wish to see this woman. Perhaps it is as well; a matter of human justice. I think she will have two men with her, and they will be armed. That reminds me, I must look at that other room. May I?"

She nodded, and sat in frowning reflection while Gascoyne went through into the other room. He found that it had an outer door opening upon a little footbridge, and this bridge gave access to a terrace above the garden at the back of the house. The ground was higher behind the Casa Felice than it was in the front, and this inner room with its second line of retreat was the very thing that Gascoyne needed. The bridge door was locked, and he put the key of it in his pocket.

Dusk was falling when he rejoined Isolda. She was sitting with one elbow on the window sill, her chin resting on the palm of her hand, and as he entered her figure straightened, and she sat listening and holding up a warning finger. Gascoyne had walked to the door opening on the stairs. There was a key in the lock, and he made sure that the lock worked.

He crossed to Isolda and they whispered together.

"I heard footsteps."

"Listen, *carissima*, listen carefully. You will receive the woman in this room. You will make her sit on this couch, you will lock that door opening on the stairs, and you will take the key. I shall be in the inner room. I have the key of the door of the bridge. I shall leave the door between these two rooms open, and I shall keep well back in the shadow and watch your enemy. You understand? If anything tragic should happen we can escape into the garden."

She nodded.

"Shall I light the lamp?"

"Yes."

"Voices—do you hear them!"

"No more talking."

She lit the lamp, and Gascoyne made a sign to her to place it on a little table at one side of the room where its light would fall upon the couch and leave the inner room in shadow. They could hear voices in the garden, and Gascoyne retreated into the inner room. Someone knocked at the door of the Casa Felice. Isolda went to the window.

"Who's there?"

Gascoyne heard the woman's voice answer her.

"You will know me when you see me. My name is Frau Winkler. This door is locked. Will you come down and open it?"

Gascoyne could see Isolda's figure in the lamplight. It seemed to grow rigid with hatred and then to tremble a little in the presence of this evil thing.

"But what do you want with me? I am all alone here."

The woman laughed.

"I think you know me, and why I am here. Will you open the door, or shall I order my agents to break in?"

Isolda drew herself up.

"The door shall be opened, but on the condition that those men remain outside the house."

"As you please. Schmidt—Heinz, sit down on that seat, and do not interfere unless I call you. Now, Signorina Benci!"

Isolda turned quickly towards the doorway of the inner room, and Gascoyne, stepping forward to meet her, answered her mute question with a nod. She had brought the key of the house door up with her, and returning to the window she held it out between finger and thumb.

"Here is the key. But I shall not unlock the door of this room unless your agents remain where they are."

"They have their orders," said the woman. "The word of an archduchess should be good enough for an Italian actress."

Isolda dropped the key, and it made a ringing noise on the stones below. Gascoyne had drawn back into the deep shadow; he heard the door of the house unlocked and the archduchess's footsteps on the stairs. Isolda was at the window watching the two men. She went to the door, opened it, and, closing it again when the archduchess had entered, withdrew the key, and letting it lie in the palm of her hand, showed it to her enemy.

"The door is locked. I hold the key until we have finished with each other. Will you be seated?"

The archduchess looked her over with serene deliberation.

"So this is Isolda Benci, the little actress from Milan. You know who I am?"

"Yes, I know you. Will you be seated?"

She pointed to the couch by the window, her eyes watching the Austrian's face.

The archduchess crossed the room and sat down, but Isolda remained standing. Gascoyne had a clear view of them both. He saw the archduchess open her velvet bag and glance at something that lay hidden in it.

"Our business will be brief. This morning I sent you a little present."

"A bunch of flowers?"

"Violets. It was a hint, a suggestion. Two months ago a certain offer was made you and you refused it."

"I refused it."

"I think I can prove to you how unwise that was."

The Austrian's face broke into a sudden brilliant smile, a smile like a momentary flash of artificial light. Her teeth gleamed, her eyes looked like hard bright glass.

"And do you still refuse it?"

"With scorn."

"You know the alternative?"

"I do."

The Archduchess Zita's mouth and nostrils became cruel. All the imperiousness of her evil soul broke to the surface, and Gascoyne saw her as a yellow, pale-eyed tiger-cat, a creature of violent impulses and passions, a royal brute whom neither God nor man had tamed.

"We do not waste our time on women whom our fool men sometimes pick up out of the gutter."

Never before had Gascoyne realized how damnably cruel a woman's tongue can be. The polite veneer cracked and peeled from the imperial person. She was the "fish-wife of history," Olympias, Poppa, Catherine, Lucrezia Borgia. Her face was an evil mask hammered out of brass, her voice strident and metallic. She let herself go, let her untamed and tyrannical passions carry her away till she was shouting like a market-woman, her mouth a vile slit, her eyes a glare of grey-green glass.

Isolda stood absolutely still. She was being pelted with foul words and the grossest accusations. The soul of her was torn off like a garment, rent, spat upon, and thrown upon the ground. She said nothing; but waited, tense, quiet, and defiant. In a little while this imperial brute would have finished its howling, and the moment would be hers.

The Austrian paused with a blaze of the eyes and the dramatic flash of a pointing hand.

"That is what you are. We shall leave you even less than that."

Isolda stood very still.

"Have you finished?"

"I have finished."

"Then I will speak. And I tell you that I know that I made the great and tragic mistake of my life when I tried to turn one of your fool men into a man. He belonged to the world in which you live—a rotten, lying, treacherous world. Had I been less innocent and less warm-hearted I should have left him when your wish put me in the gutter. For you are evil, all of you, either evil or weak."

It was a blow in the face, a calm and deliberate blow that stung, and Gascoyne's figure became alert and tense. He saw the Austrian's face flash murder. Her hand clutched something that lay in her black velvet bag.

"Your insolence decides it!"

Gascoyne was standing now, his right hand outstretched and steady as the limb



"The Englishman's pistol stopped him before he reached the stairs"

of a tree. He saw the Austrian draw a pistol from her bag and point it at Isolda, and at that moment of the tragic interlocking of their fates Gascoyne thought of nothing but the slim figure in the white dress. He uttered a cry of warning: "Down! Lie down!" But the words were caught and smothered in the noise of the two shots.

They rang out almost simultaneously, Gascoyne's a shade later than the woman's; but it was his shot that mattered. He saw a look of evil wonder on her face, a drawing back of the lips over her white teeth. She sat for a moment, staring; then her right hand dropped and the pistol clattered to the floor. She sank sideways on the couch, turned over on her face and lay still.

Isolda was still standing, but like a woman in a trance. The Austrian's bullet had passed above her head and flattened itself against the wall. She seemed conscious of nothing but that crumpled figure on the couch, that imperial assassin shot in the moment of murder.

She felt Gascoyne's hand upon her arm, and found herself looking into his grim eyes.

"Don't speak. Not a sound."

It was a whisper in her ear. He made her sit down, and, going to the window, bent down and examined the woman on the couch. She was dead, and he knelt and listened to the voices of the two men below. They were talking together in undertones.

The silence puzzled them, and the man Schmidt grew anxious. He called very cautiously below the window:

"Your Highness!"

There was no answer. He gabbled something to his companion, and then raised his voice.

"Your Highness, are you safe?"

Still there was silence. Gascoyne had crossed to Isolda and made a sign to her to go into the inner room. This grim adventure had him by the throat; he knew that it had to be carried to its inevitable end. He did some rapid thinking before giving Isolda the key of the bridge door. The two men were talking below the window of the salottino.

"Go out into the olive grove and wait."

She whispered a question in return.

"And you?"

"I must stay here and see it through. What must be—must be."

She hesitated, dumb horror in her eyes, and he pushed her gently towards the door.

"Quick! They will be coming up."

She went, like a tragic white ghost, and Gascoyne laid his ambush. There was no pity in the Englishman's heart, for he knew that these two men would show no pity, and that unless he silenced them he and Isolda would never leave Isola Bella. It was life against life—their lives against

the lives of these two accommodating scoundrels. He went softly to the door opening on the stairs and unlocked it. Isolda had given him the key—and returning to the inner room, lay flat on the floor and waited with his pistol levelled.

It happened as Gascoyne expected it would happen. Schmidt and his fellow were seized with panic; the silence had begun to scare them into wondering what had happened in that room.

They rushed the stairs, pushed into the room, and stood staring at the dead woman on the couch. Both of them were armed. Their backs were turned on Gascoyne, who lay waiting.

Schmidt gave a deep cry.

"Mein Gott, she is dead!"

They went to the couch, raised the archduchess, and realizing the truth let her sink back on the couch.

"Himmel!" and there was a frightened snarl in Schmidt's voice. "Who did it? That other woman?"

"Man, if we can catch her and kill her here we can swear they killed each other."

Then Gascoyne did one of those mad and sporting things that might have cost him his life. He felt that he could not lie there in the darkness and shoot these men down like an Irishman hiding behind a wall. The woman had been different, an imperial and murderous beast whom he had had to kill as one shoots a tiger. He sprang up and made an old Wild West job of it, with death waiting for the man who was slow and a bungler with his gun.

"It's two to one. Shoot!"

Gascoyne was an expert, and in this three-cornered duel he had Schmidt before the little man could fire. Heinz blazed in a mad panic and made for the door. His shot had ripped the sleeve of Gascoyne's coat, but the Englishman's pistol stopped him before he reached the stairs. He lay sprawling, most mercifully and cleanly dead, while Schmidt, with a look of foolish astonishment on his face, stared unseeing at the yellow lamp.

Gascoyne put up his pistol.

"Damn!" he said. "Why should a man have to do such a thing? Yet how could it be helped?"

But he was cool, shrewd even in his disgust. He went below, locked the house door on the inside, and returning to the salottino relocked its outer door and pocketed the key. Then he turned out the lamp, passed through the inner room and across the bridge and called softly to Isolda.

"Where are you?"

Her voice answered him from the olive grove just above.

"Oh, my friend, is it you? And you are safe?"

He saw her as a pale shape bending to—

(Continued on page 117.)

wards him from the dark foliage and the starlit sky. She knelt down and touched him with her hands as he leaned against the wall.

"What has happened? I heard shots."

"Child, it is over. They are dead. It had to be."

She trembled.

"Dead! Oh, what have I made you do? What will happen to you?"

"Nothing," he said. "The dead cannot speak."

He climbed up and knelt beside her under the trees.

"Isolda, it had to be. It is fate. If those two creatures of hers had got away we should never have left this island. It has been justice; I do not regret it. Do you think they would have hesitated to shoot us both? They came up here to kill you, if you had not already killed yourself, and to burn the house with you dead inside it."

She burst into tears, a convulsion of many mingled emotions. Her body shook. She clung like a frightened child to Gascoyne.

"Oh, forgive me!"

"Isolda, what is there to forgive? I am a man; I have done the work of a man. What else was there to do?"

She calmed herself a little.

"Take me away. Is it possible to escape, to forget?"

"It is possible," he said. "Leave the doing of it to me."

He made her sit down on the grass under the olives, for it was a warm and open night, and there he talked to her calmly, yet with the supreme and quiet tenderness of a lover. He wanted a mate, and she was the heaven-born mate for him. Would she trust him to take her life in his hands and hold it for her until she thought good to choose what her life should be? No, he asked for nothing—counted on nothing yet. He would not bargain with her over the incomprehensible adventure of a day. This tragedy might be the beginning or the end.

"You speak of it as incomprehensible," she said, "but is not life itself incomprehensible? I feel that I could go with you and trust you to the ends of the earth. And all in one little day!"

She touched him on the arm, a shy, delicate touch.

Presently he rose and stood looking towards the dim, grey house.

"You will not wish to enter it again?"

"No," and she shivered.

"Then—tell me—what things do you want for the journey? I will find them. And I will bring you a rug or a blanket out here, and you shall rest under the stars. We must be at the harbour at dawn, but in the meantime I have much to do."

She looked up at him questioningly.

"No, ask no questions," he hastened to say. "I shall make a riddle of this tragedy; that is all."

Gascoyne had realized the inevitableness of all that he had to do, and his plan was but an adaptation of the Austrian's grand finale. It occurred to him that it would be wiser to postpone the lighting of his funeral pyre until an hour or so before dawn, even though the Casa Felice was invisible from Porto Pino owing to the intervening ridge of Monte Maria. Even when the *Otranto* put to sea he doubted whether the little crest of flame would show above the seaward hills.

Touching the button of his electric torch he made his way down into the garden, and, sweeping the ground ahead of him with the beam of light, he came to the steps leading down from the terrace to the forest path. He was looking for something that he expected to find, and he found it under the stone table upon which Schmidt had left that bunch of violets—a can of petrol, which one of the men had carried up in a sack.

Gascoyne collected that can and made his way back by way of the bridge to the fatal room in that fatal house. He relit the lamp, glanced round the room with an air of rigid reluctance, and taking his torch with him set out to explore the rest of the house. He found Isolda's bedroom at the end of a broad white passage, and gathering a couple of blankets over his arm he returned to the olive grove and spread the blankets under a tree.

"I have found your room," he said. "What shall I pack for you?"

She was much calmer now, and mistress of her own soul.

"If you will unlock the house door I can reach my room without seeing them."

He nodded.

"I am a poor authority on women's gear. Will you come now? Then I can do what I have to do."

She went with him into the house, and Gascoyne brought the lamp and carried it before her along the passage to her room; he remained standing in the doorway while she collected all that she needed and packed the clothes and trinkets into a valise. He felt that his nearness was good for her in that fatal house, nor did her packing take many minutes, and all the while she talked to him in a gentle and intimate voice that refused to let the silence of the house play tricks with her courage.

"I must change this dress."

Gascoyne set the lamp on the floor of the room, and closing the door stood there in the darkness. He could hear her moving in the room, and presently she came out to him wearing a dark dress, a little blue-feathered toque in her hand, and a cloak over her arm.

"I am ready." And she added, looking

up at him, "It is three years since I last wore these clothes. Is not life strange!"

Gascoyne picked up the lamp and the valise, and lighted her back to the door at the foot of the stairs. He left the lamp here, and accompanied her to the olive grove.

"Shall I make your bed?"

"But I could not sleep."

He flashed the torch on the dial of his wrist watch.

"Half past nine. We have seven hours or more. Try."

"It is impossible."

"Then lie down and rest. To please me."

She lay down on the blankets, and Gascoyne wrapped them about her, and then he remembered that she had nothing upon which to rest her head. The valise was too hard and unsympathetic. He returned to the Casa Felice and brought a pillow from her room.

"How's that?"

"How kind you are. Do you know one of the great secrets—a woman's secret?"

"Well?"

"Kindness means so much."

He touched her hair with an intimate yet shy hand.

"It seems very easy to be kind," he said.

Presently he left her there under the roof of olive leaves and the stars, and returning to the Casa Felice set about the effacing of the details of the tragedy. The upper floors of the house were of wood, and Gascoyne spent half the night in collecting all the combustible stuff that he could find and making a great pile of it in the room below the salottino where the dead Austrian and her creatures lay. The last thing that he did was to remove the rings from the dead woman's fingers, and to pick up the three pistols. He threw the rings and the pistols down the deep well behind the house, and heard the echoing splashes die away in the darkness below.

It was the strangest of nights, and Gascoyne passed the rest of it sitting with his back against an olive tree close to where Isolda lay. She had fallen asleep, achieved the impossible, and Gascoyne watched the stars and listened to her breathing. He could not help wondering what their linked fates would be, whether life's great comradeship would come of it, or whether it would prove to be but the wild adventure of a day.

Two hours before dawn he rose and walked up and down under the olives and munched a couple of hard biscuits like a soldier before an assault. He lit his pipe, feeling it an eternal friendliness, a comfortable gripping of realities, something upon which to set his teeth. It decided him that it was time to act, and, leaving Isolda sleeping, he entered the Casa Felice and drenched the funeral pyre with petrol. Wool from a mattress served as an im-

provised fuse. He lit it, closed the door and went out on the terrace to watch.

There was to be no doubt as to the efficacy of the fire, nor did it fail him in those last watches of the night. The pyre flamed up with a roar, and he could see the glare of it through the chinks of the shutters. For a little while the house remained dark, but presently a yellow glow lit the open window of the room above. The flames had caught the floor and were working through it, and soon Gascoyne saw one of them leap up, cutting the window space like a waving sword.

He stood there and watched until the salottino was a cage of whirling, crackling fire. The heat of it drove him slowly back along the terrace, but he watched until the floor of the room crashed in and the flames had spread to the rest of the house. Then he went back to the olive grove and found Isolda still asleep.

He woke her, and sitting up she stared with wide, dark eyes at the doomed house. It had gathered a glow of light about its walls and roof, a broadening halo of martyrdom in the midst of the black pines.

Isolda rose and stood at Gascoyne's side. His right arm went round her.

"Explicit," he said. "The fire will have done its work before Isola Bella wakes."

They stood for half an hour and watched the burning of the house, until the flames shot through the roof and the Casa Felice became a shell of fire. The glare lit up the olive grove and turned the grey-black leaves to gold. Floating fragments of burning gossamer floated down and died upon the grass. The smoke veiled the stars.

The roof fell in at last, and Gascoyne saw that the rage of the fire was spent. He looked at his watch, shouldered Isolda's valise, and held out a hand to her.

"Come. To-morrow we shall be in Italy."

On the ridge of Monte Maria they paused and looked back. The darkness still held, and on that farther hill they saw nothing but a little redness like a great lantern-hung among the branches of the pines.

Gascoyne spoke.

"In an hour," he said; "and when the daylight comes, it will be finished. Perhaps someone will notice during the day that the Casa Felice has put on mourning."

As the sun rose, a dome of gold above a sea of amethyst, the Otranto put out of Porto Pino, and the island smiled at them in the dawn.

Gascoyne was holding Isolda's hand.

"It is the end and the beginning," he said. "Are you afraid?"

She stood close to him, looking back at Isola Bella.

"Love is a thing to be feared," she answered, "and yet—"

"And yet?"

"I hold fast to your hand."

THE COQUETTE

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By WARWICK DEEPING,

Author of "Love Among the Ruins,"

"Mad Barbara," "Uther and

Igraine," "Bess of the

Woods," &c., &c.

"The wind'll blow ye down the hill,
Dicky. Them two ewes will lamb to-
night, ye say?"

"They're just ripe."

"How the little 'uns do sing! A warm
corner to you, Dick, down in Thirle vil-
lage. It's going to blow a bit to-
night."

Over the downs a gray gold sky was
skimming, touching the sea in the far
south where a faint flash of foam whiten-
ed the waves. The two shepherds were
standing at the doorway of the hut. Be-
low them, in a great hollow of the sleek
green hills, the sheep were pastured for
the night. The plaintive whinnying cries
of many lambs came up with the deeper
bleating of the ewes.

Dick Thayer, fair skinned, round-head-
ed, robust young Saxon, swung a sack
over his shoulder, and left the elder man
filling his pipe, and looking out towards
the sea. He had been a week on the
downs without a glimpse of his children
or the snug glow of his own fire, for
with the waning of the year the shep-
herd's day is lengthened till it numbers
the hours of a long night.

Seven good miles lay between Thirle
village and the shepherd's hut, hidden in
the folds of the great rolling hills. The
wind : at Dick's sturdy back, and
blowing, flung the sheep-dog's tangle of
hair into his alert and plaintive eyes.

Down in the valley Dick found the roads
rutted up with mud, heavy going after
the sleek, crisp turf above. The sky be-
came a mere swirl of fleecy darkness as
he trudged the last mile into Thirle vil-
lage.

Dick Thayer passed the group of elm
trees that stood like sentinels about the
squat tower of Thirle church. His cot-
tage was the first in the village, standing
on the right hand side of the road among
a few gnarled old apple trees. With its
dark thatch it bore no distant resem-
blance to a hay-stack, and a delightful
sinuosity of outline added to the illusion.

The first thing that struck Dick Thayer
as he turned in at the garden gate was
that there were no lights burning behind
the front windows of the cottage. It was
not the first time that he had come home
in the dark, to find the fire out, and no
lights lit, for Dick's young wife was a

lights lit, for Dick's young wife was a
gad-about (W.) a coquette. Half Thirle
village believed that the shepherd had
been tempted into marrying a fool with
a pretty face.

The front door was locked. Dick went
round to the little back yard, and saw
through the kitchen window the faint
glow of a half-dead fire. The back door
yielded to him when he tried the latch.

"Hello, daddy!"

A girl of three staggered up from the
brick floor and made a bolt for her
father's legs.

"Hello, little 'un; what—all in the
dark! Where's mother?"

"Goned out with Mrs. Ridden."

Dick Thayer frowned. His eye fell on a
plump bundle that was crawling crabwise
towards him over the floor. It was the
baby.

"Stand aside, dearie," and he felt
for the matches in his pocket, struck a
light, and lit a candle in a candle-
stick standing on the shelf above the fire-
place.

The darkness had covered a multitude of
housewifely sins, and not the least of
them to be revealed was the fact that
these two children had been left alone
with an open fire. How near they had
been to a very possible tragedy could
be judged by the ciner dirt on the baby's
face.

Dick Thayer picked up the child, a feel-
ing of resentment against the mother ris-
ing in his heart.

"'Ook, daddy!"

The imp had a piece of charred stick in
its fist. It had been poking about among
the embers; hands, bib, and face were
smeared with dirt.

"Here's a pretty pickle! What have
you been at, Gracie, eh?"

The girl of three was as grimed and
guilty as the infant.

"Babby would see the ick-e sparks fly
up the chimbley, daddy."

Suggestions of wise chastisement flick-
ered through Dick Thayer's brain. He
had not the heart for it, however. It was
not the children's fault, but the
mother's.

With the philosophy of a man who has
learnt to be very patient, the shepherd
turned to, despite his seven mile walk, to
do the work of his pretty wife. He went
out to the shed at the back of the cot-
tage, brought in half a faggot, and soon
had a mass of flames licking the great
black pot that hung upon the chain. The
roller towel on the kitchen door looked
more like a dish rag than an aid to

more like a dish rag than an aid to cleanliness. Dick trudged up the stairs with the candle, after warning the two children against going near the fire, and rummaged in the chest where Rose Thayer kept her linen. The bed had not been made in the room, nor the slops of the preceding night emptied, and his wife's clothes were littered everywhere with a confusion that was characteristic.

Dick returned below with a clean towel, ladled hot water out of the black pot into a basin, took off his coat, and proceeded to wash his children's faces. The baby lay in its cradle, sucking a fat thumb, while the girl Grace, perched on her father's knee before the fire, was the first to suffer the ordeal of the flannel.

"You do rub rough, daddy!"

Dick Thayer smiled rather a tired smile.

"Rougher than mother?"

"Muvver don't rub so."

"Don't she?" and the shepherd had visions of a lick and a dip as he conscientiously polished Miss Grace's cheeks.

The dirty pinafore was removed, and the baby next sacrificed to the same spirit of cleanliness. There appeared to be a decided difference of opinion between Dick Thayer and his son. Perhaps the flannel was too new, and the infant objected, and was not to be appeased by any snapping of fingers, and jogging of knees. Dick persevered with the patience of a man of principles. It was after seven before he had carried the children upstairs, undressed them, and bestowed them between the sheets.

The shepherd returned to the empty kitchen, and being prompted perhaps by a glance at the cheap clock ticking on the mantel shelf, conceived a very human hunger for his supper. He went into the little box of a larder, and proceeded to review the contents thereof with the zest of a man who has walked seven miles on a March day.

There was not much variety in the way of food, precious little in truth to eat at all. A few cold potatoes in a pie dish, one egg, a rasher of bacon, half a loaf of stale bread, a cubic inch of butter, and a saucer full of jam. Dick Thayer purloined the solitary egg and the rasher of bacon, and having laid the table, and hung the kettle on the chain, proceeded to boil the egg and to fry the rasher.

He was in the act of filling the tea-pot when the sound of voices came to him from the patch of garden fronting the road. Dick Thayer closed the lid of the

road. Dick Thayer closed the lid of the tea-pot, and stood listening, with the kettle in his hand. The fitting of the cottage doors and casements fell far short of perfection, and it was possible to hear much that was said by people in the road.

"Good-night, my dear. Now you needn't pay me for that blouse of mine this week, mind. Don't you think that cousin Fred of mine a fine young feller?"

The voice was bold and strident, a voice that Dick Thayer had grown to know too well of late. He could imagine Jenny Ridden, big, bold-eyed, mannerless, leaning her fat arms on his garden gate, and making friendly grimaces at Rose, his wife.

"Come in, Jenny, won't you?"

"Ain't the time. Must drop in at The George, and get the old man his pot of beer. Keeps him in a good temper, poor old lunny. When's Dick comin' down again?"

"Don't know."

"And don't care much, my tulip? Ta-ta, drop round to-morrow."

"Good-night, Jenny, good-night. Say your prayers proper," and the big woman moved off with a coarse laugh.

Dick Thayer was bending over the fire when his wife opened the back door and entered the kitchen. She was a plump, pretty little woman, with child's eyes, and a rather petulant mouth, her fluffy brown hair puffed up and waved under a smart red hat.

"Dick!"

She looked surprised, and not wholly pleased, the more so because she caught the troubled frown on her husband's face as he turned to her from the fire. A restless conscience convicted her of many small sins against the home.

"I've just come down for a night," he said; "old Peter Callington took my place."

She put down the parcel she was carrying rather sharply on the table.

"Where's the children?"

"In bed."

"I suppose you're cross, Dick. How's a woman to know that her husband's coming home, just like a thief in the night?"

(23)

Dick Thayer fixed a slice of bread on the end of a knife, and sat down again before the fire. Rose, at the table, could see nothing but his bent shoulders, and the bare outline of a patient profile.

the bare outline of a patient profile.

"D'you think much about the children, Rose?" he asked quietly.

"Think?" and she began to unpin her smart hat.

"You left them here alone with an open fire. Wasn't that a bit—"

She broke in for self-justification before he could accuse her fully.

"Don't I have them with me all day? Stay at home and mind 'em yourself for twelve hours on end, and see how you like it. I was only down the village to see Jenny Ridden."

"I heard her voice," said the man, turning the piece of bread with characteristic deliberation.

"Any more complaints ready? I'm listening."

She had taken off her hat, and was running one of the pins backwards and forwards through the straw. Dick Thayer had turned to her from the fire. He was one of those quiet men whose very quietness is irritating to a selfish and half-disciplined girl.

"I've told you I don't like that woman, Rose."

"Well, I do, and there's the difference."

"She's not the sort of woman I like you to be neighbourly with."

"Goodness gracious, what's Jenny done—"

"I don't want her inside my house."

"That's nice of you—"

"And I don't want you—in here."

She was still stabbing at the hat with the pin, her mouth very low in the corners, and her blue eyes sullen beneath lowered lids. Dick Thayer looked at her sadly, and deposited a slice of toast on one of the plain white plates.

"Come along, lass. I don't want to quarrel, you know. It's only because I'm a bit fond of you and the house. Let's have supper. I've been making you this toast."

She stood at the far end of the table, sullen and irresponsible.

"I don't want supper."

"Come along—now."

"What did you come back for if you only came to fuss and grumble?"

Dick pushed his chair back, and held out an arm.

"What d'we want to quarrel for, Rose?"

"I ain't quarrelling."

He rose and went towards her, but she edged away.

"Don't fuss after me; I hate fussing. I'm going up to bed."

"I'm going up to bed."

"Give me a kiss, lass, to show there's no ill-feeling."

"I don't want kissing."

And with an attempt at hauteur that was not impressive, partly because her skirt caught on a nail in the oak box by the door, she left her husband to drink his tea, and think.

The shepherd slept before the kitchen fire that night, on the old horse-hair couch he had dragged in from the front parlour. His sheep-dog Billy lay curled up on a sack, for Dick had brought the dog in from the wood shed for company. And above, in the front bedroom, under the thatch, Rose Thayer lay awake, waiting for her husband's step upon the stairs. But Dick would not come to her that night, and Rose was far too fond of her wisely self-respect to confess to defeat by calling him.

Dick was up early, and washing at the pump in the back yard by the grey light of the dawn, with Billy's brown eyes solemnly watching the ablution through a tangled thatch of hair.

When he had made a meal, he took a clean cup from the cupboard, put three lumps of sugar therein and the last spoonful of milk from the jug, about two thimblefuls had been his own share. Rose was awake and heard her husband creaking up the stairs. She pretended to be asleep, as he fumbled for the latch in the dark, for it was not politic that Dick should suspect that she had lain long awake over the words he had spoken.

She opened her eyes and yawned when she knew that he was standing by the bed.

"I've brought you a cup of tea, Rose. It's time I started."

"Put it down on the chair, please."

Dick put it down.

"There's the money on the kitchen table," he said slowly. "You'll be careful with it, Rose?"

"Oh, of course."

He turned sadly to say good-bye to the two children. The baby was kicking enthusiastically in its cot. Grace's arms went round her father's neck. With the readiness of childhood she had forgotten the Spartan use of the flannel on the preceding night.

"Good-bye, Daddy!"

Dick Thayer kissed them both, and then turned and bent over his wife in bed.

"Good-bye, Rose!"

She ordered him to kiss her, but did

"Good-bye, Rose!"

She suffered him to kiss her, but did not lift her head from the pillow to meet his lips. It was one of Jenny Ridden's robust sayings that a wife should not be too much in haste to satisfy her husband. Jenny Ridden believed in obtaining her full share of "fun," as she called it; and Rose, poor little wife, who had not been chastened by any great sorrow, admired the masterfulness of this loud-voiced, downright, but not over-honest friend.

So she lay in bed to maintain her dignity, while Dick trudged for the Downs with a dull ache at his heart, wondering, as he tramped the muddy roads, why his home-life was not happy.

It was April, and Easter-time, and on the Monday Mr. Bibby's "steam horses," shooting booths, and coconut alleys were due at Thirle in the meadow behind The George.

Easter Monday came, with a sea fog hanging like a white pall over the Downs. There had been some glimmering through of sunshine about noon, so though the sun had sought to behave with proper consideration towards Mr. Bibby and his patrons. But the day remained a day of silver mist and stagnant dew, with no wind moving, and the elm trees by the church standing like great grey ghosts, shrouded in vapour, silent and unmoved.

The clock in the squat church tower struck five as Rose Thayer cleared away the tea things into a dismal unwashed heap on the dresser by the sink. Dick was away on the Downs, alone with Billy and the sheep. Rose Thayer bustled the children up to bed, despite Gracie's plaintive appeals to be taken to see Mr. Bibby's horses. Rose could not be bothered with the child on such an evening, for she was due at Jenny Ridden's at six o'clock, whence she and several other girls were to be "arm out" by the soldier cousin and some gentlemen of Mrs. Ridden's especial clique.

Rose put the children to bed, and gathering up an armful of finery with a new hat packed on the top thereof, she adjourned to the kitchen to dress herself in peace before the fire.

Jenny Ridden was at tea with her guests when the shepherd's wife stepped into that lady's parlour. Two or three girls were bunched in a giggling tittering group before the fire, acting as an appreciative counterpoise to three young

man who were ranged along the opposite wall between a sewing machine and a bookcase. The company had been amusing itself by throwing strips of orange peel about the room—a very tangible form of wit that sufficed for rustic repartee.

Rose Thayer sat down on a stool by the window, a little shy, despite her smart clothes, and the consciousness of being the prettiest woman in the room.

"You haven't brought your husband, I gather," said Mrs. Ridden, ironically, cramming a cube of sugar into a hole in an orange.

Rose Thayer blushed; every one seemed staring at her.

"Dick's away with the sheep."

"Wise cove!" quoth the soldier with a laugh. "Any one say 'Rats'?"

The girls giggled. Mrs. Ridden, who was dressed for the evening, flattened her large and loquacious mouth against the orange.

"My old man's quite happy down at The George," she said between strenuous and not over-reined moments of suction. "With a bob in his pocket and plenty of beer about he's as good as any angel. I can hear the music, girls; what about starting?"

The company consented to be marshalled with much giggling and pushing and assumptions of shyness. The room was not a large one, and its inmates found themselves delightfully crowded in hustling towards the door. It was in this tittering, squeaking crush that Rose Thayer discovered a male arm half-crooked about her waist.

She turned sharply with a little wriggle of protestation, and found herself looking in the soldier's face.

"Don't do that."

"Hoity-toity!" and he grinned.

"What's wrong there?" said Jenny from the rear.

"Some one says she don't like a fellow's arm round her."

"No, I don't."

"Lor, there's a give-away for you, Rose."

"She's only pretending, you know."

And they all laughed, except the shepherd's wife, who looked hot and a little abashed.

That Easter evening at the show proved no such happy carnival as Rose Thayer had known of old. The year before, and the year before that, she had enjoyed it under the shelter of Dick's broad shoulders. But that evening she lacked

shoulders. But that evening she lacked something that the rough lads and girls were not there to give. From the very first she had the feeling of being at the mercy of the crowd. And the one figure that came between her and the romping larking boys seemed there for its own advantage, and not—in truth—for hers.

They were near the merry-go-round. A lanky youth had just spurted scent into Rose's face, and pulled the strings of her hat undone when she turned on him with a flash of the eyes. The soldier's hand was on her arm. He pushed her towards the "horses" that had come to a halt, while the steam organ blared "Dolly Gray."

"Come along, my dear."

"Don't—"

"Up we go."

He took her up, willy-nilly, and carried her towards the nearest horse. The grass was sodden and trampled into liquid mud about the merry-go-round, and whether it was because Rose struggled or not, the man's foot slipped, they sprawled, and the crowd roared.

A muddy dress and a hat awry are not comforting to a vain woman.

"'Ard luck, 'ard luck!"

"Try it again, my dear."

Jenny Ridden flustered forward, her friendship was not wholly Christian in its coarse candour.

"My word, what a mess! You do look a fright! That clumsy fool of a Fred—"

The soldier was grinning, and wiping the mud from his trousers.

"Better luck next time."

Rose, too, was conscious of the rude amusement of the crowd, stood looking at her knees, angry, and very miserable.

"I'll go home," she said suddenly.

"Come—come—"

"Yes, I will; I wish I hadn't come."

"Don't say that, my dear," said the soldier with a smirk.

There were tears in her eyes as she pushed through the crowd, feeling the glare of the naphtha lamps hot upon her face. For the first time perhaps in her life she knew what it meant to be alone in such a place. The boys jeered at her. Two girls at the sweet stall burst into rude laughter as she passed. A group of youths lounging at the gate stared in her face and hustled her, just for fun. The hoot of the engine whistle seemed to sound a last mocking note as she sped past the windows of The George, with a babel of rough voices following her as she went.

with a babel of rough voices following her as she went.

For the first time in many months Rose Thayer's heart longed for her own home. That dull little cottage by the church had some meaning for her that night. She hurried for it in a blind, instinctive way, like a bird to cover, for Rose was a woman who could be influenced only through her emotions. The adventure pointed no logical moral to her. She felt like a child, reacted like a child, without appreciating as yet the things that made life blessed.

Rose had turned into the dark entry towards the church when she heard footsteps following along the road. They overtook her near where an old yew tree grew in a cottage garden. It was Jenny Ridden's soldier, brisk, self-assured, a bull-faced egotist in khaki.

"You're in a hurry, my dear."

She gave him rather a frightened look as he swung to her side.

"Can't let you go home all alone," and he laughed. "Sorry we had that spill. Must be feeling a bit lonesome, eh?"

He tried to put his arm in hers. She drew aside sharply.

"Please let me be."

"Easy, my dear, easy."

"Why don't you go back to the others?"

"You'll say good night to a fellow first."

A sudden horror of the man possessed her. She turned and ran, her breath coming and going in short, sharp gasps, her muddy skirt clinging about her knees. The soldier stood irresolute a moment, shouted an insult after her, and then turned back by the way he had come.

Rose Thayer came to her own gate, very frightened, with a strange feeling of humiliation burning in her heart. A dog's bark challenged her as she went in under the old apple tree. It was Billy, Dick's dog, her husband's dog.

She bent down and hugged the rough-haired beast as he sprang up and set his forepaws against her body.

"Dear old Billy, boy. Where's master?"

She turned to the cottage, but the dog broke away towards the gate, whimpering. Rose stood puzzled.

"What is it, Billy?"

The dog gave a short sharp bark, and sprang over the gate into the road. A sudden thought seized Rose Thayer as she stood. Where was her husband; in the cottage? She went in, called and searched, but Dick Thayer was not there.

the cottage? She went in, called and searched, but Dick Thayer was not there. And she could still hear Billy whimpering and whining at the gate.

That April night was fated to seem the longest night Rose Thayer had ever spent, save perhaps the night when her first child was born. It was the dog Billy who opened those hours of suspense and remorse for her with his whimperings, whinnerings that lured her out into the road, and on towards the deep night over the distant Downs. Inspired with dread by the dog's restless and appealing ways, she knocked at the door of a neighbouring cottage where old Jim Morris, the carter, lived, showed him Billy whimpering and barking, making short runs in the direction of the Downs, and returning again as though to bid them follow.

Jim Morris watched the dog a moment, and then turned back into his cottage, and with a word or two to his wife, took down a lantern from the beam, put on his coat, with an extra candle in the pocket thereof, reached for his bat and stick, and went out into the road.

"Will ye come?" he asked.

Rose's eyes were full of the shadow of fear.

"Where?"

"Where the dog leads, my dear. He's askin' us to come."

"I'll come," she said.

The dawn was breaking before they brought Dick Thayer into Thirle village, lying on straw in the bottom of a farm cart, with Rose sitting by him, holding his hand. Dick had been coming home with Billy that night through the mist, lost the path in the darkness, and walked into an old chalk pit where the fence that should have guarded it had rotted where it stood. He was still unconscious when the cart came slowly into Thirle village. Rose, mute, her eyes red and blurred, sat by his side, wondering in a blind way what would be the end.

Jim Morris had sent word on by a farm lad, and the two children had been taken into the carter's cottage so that they should not see their father's home-bringing. The village doctor was waiting at the gate. Two men carried Dick Thayer in on a hurdle, with Billy sniffling at their legs, and Rose following, still in her mud-stained luckless dress. They laid the shepherd on the old horse-hair sofa in the front parlour, and left him alone with the doctor and his wife.

"Will he—?"

"Will he—?"

She stood, holding the door open, and looking at the unconscious figure on the couch.

"You mustn't worry, Mrs. Thayer."

"But—sir—"

"A broken arm, I'm afraid, and concussion of the brain. I'm going across home for some splints."

"But, doctor, he won't die?"

The surgeon looked at the strained face.

"No, I don't think he will die," he said.

It was noon before Dick Thayer recovered consciousness, and found himself lying in his own cottage with his right arm bandaged and in splints. Old Mrs. Morris was sitting at his side, knitting grey worsted socks with wooden pins.

"Hallo—why—?"

Jim Morris' wife bent over him, and laid a hand on his shoulder.

"It's all right with ye, Dicky," she said.

He looked round, eyeing the familiar room, his glance resting at last on the old woman's face.

"Where's Rose?" he asked.

"With the children. Doctor says she mayn't see ye just yet."

That evening a plaintive and humbled figure crept into the room, and knelt down beside the horse hair couch. It was the figure of a woman, and of a young wife in tears, her heart overflowing with the bitterness of self-condemnation.

"Why, Rose—lass, I'm here all right, ain't I?"

She hung her head, and tears fell on the hand he stretched to her.

"You mustn't take on like this, my dear; why, what's amiss?"

She held his hand, and looked down at her own knees.

"I've been thinking. Dick, I've been thinking—"

"What have you been thinking, Rose?"

"That I've been but a poor wife to you, Dick. I didn't think, I didn't feel—somehow—till last night."

Her sobbing stifled the confession. Dick Thayer's face was the face of a man in love.

"Why, Rose, dear, I never said nothing—"

"That's how it was, Dick; you didn't say enough to me. I just took your money and your love—and oh—I'm sorry, Dick, I'm sorry."

He held out his arm, and she let her

man, a man who...

He held out his arm, and she let her head fall forward on his shoulder. "Why—this—this is like home," he said, with a tremor in his voice.

"Home, Dick. It shall be home for you, lad, God helping me."

THE TWO SHEPHERDS.

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By WARWICK DEERING.

Author of "Uther and Igraine," "Love Among the Ruins," "A Woman's War," &c., &c.

The first Monday after Michaelmas Day Jasper Stone trudged down from the hills, and walked through Masserfield Village to Jane Halliday's cottage under the yews.

Jasper Stone threw a huge shadow in the sunlight. And the great fist that knocked at Jane Halliday's door was big and brown and heavy.

"Lord, be't you, Jasper!"

The shepherd's tanned and rather swarthy face appeared solemn and expectant. Jane in her doorway, round-bodied, sturdy, with a mop of grizzled hair, looked at him with an air of plump commiseration.

"Petronil be 'unt here," she said.

"Ah!" quoth Jasper, "I doubted of that."

Jane gave a grimace. She stepped up, glanced up and down the road, and then drew Jasper in by the sleeve.

"I can't keep a hold o' the wench. You can guess where she be! Ever since William Wood and the blessed martyrs were burnt at Lewes, and this preaching Pycroos came round with the word o' God—"

Jasper looked her steadily in the eye, and nodded. He had a slow way with him, the way of a man who was very strong and very obstinate.

"Wallingore Wood?" he asked.

"I guess so."

"Not them," said he, "these babblers! They'd have the country burn itself for the fling of a text."

Before sundown Jasper was searching Wallingore Wood, threading the green rides and ways, and stopping often to listen. The birch trees were yellow, but the oaks showed never a touch of autumnal gold, and the hazels were as dense and as green as in midsummer.

When Jasper came near Rushhole he

heard a jay screaming and flapping from tree to tree. The raucous scolding voice of the bird might have mimicked the voice of Master Pycroos the Preacher.

Jasper gave a wag of the head, and bore down towards Rushhole. It was not long before he heard the sound of a voice, strident and abusive even at a distance. Good Master Pycroos stood down yonder on the stump of a tree bawling of salvation, damning the Pope, and defying Bonner and Mary the Queen.

Jasper stood behind a beech tree, and watched the knot of people that had grouped itself close to a clump of hollies. He could see Petronil Halliday standing there in her russet gown, her face upturned in the evening sunlight, a white scarf crossed over her bosom. Some twenty Protestants had tramped from the various villages and gathered in Wallingore Wood to hear Preacher Pycroos hold forth upon salvation.

A lean man was the preacher, with a sharp, maddlesome, bitter face, and a voice that had the rasp of a saw. The hot self-conceit of the fanatic spouted forth in the fire of his declaiming. Jasper watched Petronil Halliday's face. It amazed him that this girl with the hazel eyes and the adorable mouth should be lured into listening to this screaming, flapping jay.

The gathering broke up before dusk—the people scattering different ways into the woodland, and Jasper waited for Petronil to take the path towards Masserfield village. She came alone through the dusk of the hazels, walking slowly, supremely unconscious of the fact that she was watched. Her brown eyes were frightened, and a little angry when she saw Jasper waiting behind the trunk of the beech trees.

"Is it you—Jasper!"

The man put himself at her side, and they went together through Wallingore Wood. Jasper could see that Petronil was shy of him, and a little afraid of what he might be minded to say to her. For a while they kept silence amid the hazels, and under the great twisting boughs of the oaks. The wood seemed very still now that the preacher's voice had ceased its upbraiding.

"Why do you come to these meetings, Petronil?"

His impatience had welled up and run

ings, *et cetera*!

His impatience had welled up and run over, though tenderness lurked in his eyes.

"Because it is good that I should come."

Her serenity had caught something of the preacher's emotion.

"Because I am a sinner," she added, "and because I have been wandering in error."

Jasper looked at her as he might have looked at a rose that called itself *filthy*.

"Then what must the rest of us be? There is your mother—"

She sighed.

"It will come to her, Jasper."

"As good and clean a woman as there is in the country. This gadabout Pycross—"

"Is a true servant of God. Master Pycross is not afraid of the faggots."

Jasper's eyes gave a deep gleam.

"They can burn twenty such crows for all I care," he said; but I am thinking o' some one comelier than Master Pycross."

Her eyes veered to his with the faintest glimmer of fear and self-interrogation.

"Well, Jasper, if God should will it—"

"No preacher will make me believe that God wills such things," he answered sturdily.

They were out of the wood, and coming down a green hillside dotted with sheep. Petronil looked into the distance with thoughtful eyes. And all the way to Maserfield village Jasper argued and reasoned in vain.

Jasper loitered under one of the old yews after Petronil had gone into the cottage. He hoped for a few words with her mother, and possibly Jane Halliday was as eager to speak with Shepherd Stone. She appeared under the great corner post of the cottage, and beckoned to Jasper through the dusk.

Now Jane Halliday was a woman of placid inclinations, satisfied with religion as Parson Bole painted it, and more busied with household affairs than with the subtleties of transubstantiation and auricular confession. Parson Bole was a comfortable and kindly man. Dame Halliday was content that he should shepherd her soul.

These pots of boiling water put me out of patience with life," she said to Jasper under the yews. "This Preacher Pycross be like a straw working through a bed cover. He gives folk no

through a bed cover. He gives folk no peace with his ticklings and his prickings. Justice Standers should take him and send him to the Bishop."

Jasper was grave and troubled.

"He might drag others after him."

Jane caught his eyes, opened her mouth, and said nothing for the moment.

"I'd swear to twenty lies before I saw my child burnt at the stake," said she.

Jasper nodded his big head.

"Maybe she'll tire of it," he suggested as he turned out of the wicket gate.

It was the Friday following that Jasper Stone came down from the hills, and walked by way of Bog Lane to Maserfield Village. The day had a gray head and sad eyes, and a wind piped through the trees, and buffeted the hedges. The cloud scud came fast out of the west, and in the thickets the young ashes clashed together.

Jasper had come to the Claypits, where the road from Stonecross cut Bog Lane, when he met three of Justice Standers' servants followed by a dozen country fellows armed with bills and staves. They passed Jasper with the look of men who wished him elsewhere, and the shepherd heard one of them say that it would rain before they reached Five Oaks hill. Now Five Oaks hill was seven miles away, and Jasper trudged on slowly, wondering whether this marching of men concerned Master Pycross and his Protestants. He had not gone more than a hundred paces when he heard some one running over the grass behind him.

He turned and found Will Wake the carter coming down the lane, a brown, buncy man with huge feet that flapped the ground as he ran. Will was a friend of Jasper's, but the shepherd had not noticed him among those who followed Justice Standers' servants.

"Hi, Jasper—man—quick, a word with you. Preacher Pycross be in Wallingore Wood."

Jasper stood and stared.

"Rushhole—eh?"

"I guess so. Old Jane Halliday's wench will be there, poor child."

"Then the Justice has sent his men—?"

"We were bidden to come out with our bills and staves. I must get on, or they will scent a trick."

The carter grinned at Jasper, and ran back along the road to overtake Jun-

and Jasper, and ran back along the road to overtake Justice Standers' servants. He had trumped up an excuse, pretended to look for something, and then pelted along on the grass to give Jasper warning.

Jasper had no need to consider what he should do. He scrambled through the hedge and set off running across a field of stubble in the direction of Wallingore. The shepherd was known for his long legs and his running, and he went through hedges and over ditches like a runaway horse. The oaks of Wallingore rose up before him, and Jasper grew cautious. It was well for him that he drew in and scouted when he did, for, on pushing his head through a gap in a hedge, he saw Justice Standers and Parson Bole sitting on their horses under a yew tree on the edge of the wood. Jasper doubled himself, and scuttled along the hedge with his chin close to his knees. He reached Wallingore without the two under the yew tree seeing him, and striking the main road towards Rushole, he ran like a stag under the arches of the hazels.

It seemed a great while before he heard the cawing of the preacher's voice. That sound was infinitely sweet to Jasper. The fanatic was still preaching to the heretics, and Jasper knew that he had reached Rushole before the Justice's men.

Jasper broke in upon Master Pycross's preaching, and saw white faces turned to him in the gray light of the autumn day.

"The Justice's men are after you," he shouted. "Scatter—unless you wish to stand in the faggots."

Jasper's eyes searched for Petronil Hallday, and found her under the shade of one of the old hollies. The other folk did not concern him. He thought only of Petronil and of getting her out of the wood.

Some of the people were slipping away among the trees. A few stood irresolute. Then Preacher Pycross's voice rose in an exultant caw.

"I thank Thee—oh—Lord—that I am held worthy to be persecuted of men. Let us stand firm in the faith. Let us not see from before the face of the Jebel of Home."

Jasper had an arm about Petronil, but he felt her stiffen herself to resist. Her eyes were turned towards Master Pycross perched in fanatical ecstasy upon the stump of his tree.

"Let me be—Jasper."

He glanced from Petronil to the

"Let me be—Jasper."

He glanced from Petronil to the preacher.

"Come away—child."

"I will not desert this good man—"

"Out on the braying jackass! Am I to let you burn because he has the tongue of a scold!"

His eyes were ugly towards Pycross, and his arm tightened about Petronil's body.

"Do you think I will let you burn for you bit, of crackling buckram? Come away! Most of the folk have gone—and left him."

"The more reason—"

Jasper swung her up in his arms.

"I take your life in my own hands," he said: "I tell you I love you better than that man Pycross loves himself."

She struggled a little as Jasper turned towards the trees. But his great strength was unanswerable; it took no denial, yet was without roughness or pain. His eyes flared in his swarthy face, and his mouth was grim and straight.

Pycross flashed a bony forefinger at him as he crossed the glade.

"Young man, the wrath of God shall fall on those who come between Him and his children."

Jasper turned with a jerk of the head.

"Fool! Light your own bonfire."

And he went with great strides into the wood.

It was very well to run away with the girl, but Petronil proved patiently stubborn. Though she lay quiet in Jasper's arms, her spirit was in revolt against him, and in no temper for a surrender.

"Where are you taking me?" she asked him.

"Home."

He was brief and laconic, for his wits were on the alert for any sign of Justice Standers' men.

"You may think it very fine to be strong in the body."

"No—not I. It is useful at times."

"It is better to be strong in the spirit."

"Tut-tut, child, is my love for you a broken-kneed nag? The pride is with you."

She looked up into his intent, grim face, and met his eyes. He was thinking how Master Pycross's piety had come near turning Petronil into that most abominable of creatures, a prim, self-righteous woman. His anger grew against the fanatic. Master Pycross had

against the fanatic. Master Pycross had come trampling with his great feet over things that were natural, and innocent, and human.

Petronil spoke again.

"Well, you can take me home."

"Surely."

"But I can tell the truth. You cannot take the tongue out of my mouth, or the fire out of my heart."

Jasper stopped short, and stood looking down into her eyes as though she had struck him and he was considering the meaning of the blow.

"To be sure," he said, "to be sure. We are nearly out of the wood."

He pushed on and reached a hazel-hedge with a broad clean ditch on the other side of it and beyond the ditch a field of stubble. He peered through and saw no one in sight, and climbing down with Petronil he began to walk along the ditch bottom.

The girl stiffened in his arms.

"This is not the way to Masserfield!"

"Nor is it," he said, "but I like it better."

The conviction came to Jasper that his love was fighting Pycross the Preacher for the possession of Petronil Haldiday. The girl had been caught by the frenzy of religious passion that had sent scores of men and women to the stake. Jasper knew how real and grim the danger was, and his vision of Petronil in the flames made him fierce and masterful. What were the dogmas thrown from a few old men's tongues compared with the comeliness and youth of a girl's heart.

Jasper skirted Wallingore, struck along a series of hedges, reached a second wood, and passing through it, came to the beginnings of the hills. He set Petronil upon her feet, partly to rest himself, partly to see how her mood moved her. She stood quite still, and looked at him with a tremor of light in her brown eyes.

"Jasper?"

"Well."

"What are you going to do?"

"Take you to a place where you will be safe."

A sense of her own helplessness roused her impatience.

"How dare you play the bully with me—!"

"I dare anything," he said, "to keep you out of the flames."

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The uplands with their wastes of whin

and heather rose into blue distances against the grayness of the evening sky. The wind swayed the furze bushes, and whistled in the coarse grass.

"Shall I carry you, or will you walk?"

She looked at him curiously, with something shining behind her anger.

"Since you have taken it upon yourself, you can carry me," she said.

So Jasper climbed the hills with Petronil lying in his arms.

Jasper's cottage lay amid pines and heather upon the great forest ridge above the wald. There were stretches of short, sweet grass amid the wastes and commons, where the sheep were pastured and suffered to wander at will. For the shepherd it was a solitary life, a life of meditation, a watching of the clouds and birds and the ways of wind and rain. Jasper had prospered with his sheep, and his love for Petronil had begun to persuade him that the life would be too lonely even for a village girl. He had had an eye upon a little farm down by Masserfield, and plans for taking Petronil thither.

But Preacher Pycross had changed all this; and the cottage on the hills rose opportunity out of the autumn twilight. It was built of rough timber and plaster, and roofed with heather thatch, a square and sturdy place hunching its shoulders against the wind. The windows were mere narrow openings, too small even for a woman to climb through them. A wild garden, a few fruit trees, and some rough out-houses surrounded the cottage. Jasper's bob-tailed sheep-dog, Harry, leapt at the end of his chain, and barked through the dusk.

Jasper unlocked the door, and took Petronil into the cottage.

"There might be a worse refuge," he said.

She smoothed her clothes, sat down on a settle under one of the narrow windows, and remained silent and pre-occupied. Jasper went on his knees before the hearth. Kindling and wood were ready to hand. The throat of the chimney was soon full of leaping flames.

Harry the sheep-dog lay and watched the pair with his bright eyes half hidden by tangled hair.

Jasper rose from his knees with a sudden easy cheerfulness.

"Here we are—you and I—dear heart. There is nothing like a good fire and a good supper after a tramp over the hills."

Petronil held her face half averted

hills." Petronil held her face half averted.

"I wonder what has happened to Preacher Pyroos," she said.

Jasper had taken his hollywood platters from the cupboard. He stopped half way between cupboard and table, and looked at Petronil with watchful eyes.

"The preacher has long legs," he observed; "he can run as well as the rest of us."

The pulse of her head was perverse and obstinate.

"No. He often said that he would never run from his enemies, and that he would meet martyrdom without flinching."

Jasper put the platters on the table.

"If he is a brave man, all honour to him," he said; "but that is no reason why he should rob you of life."

"You do not understand—"

"Ah—why not? I am a shepherd. And our Lord was a good shepherd. I was never taught to drive my sheep into quarries or over cliffs, or into the thick of a forest fire."

Petronil shrugged her shoulders.

"The soul cries out for the truth," she said; "and its voice cannot be stifled."

Supper was a silent meal, and at the end thereof Jasper took his hat and staff and stood between Petronil and the door. Her eyes questioned him by the light of the fire. Partly she dashed him, partly she feared to be left alone.

"Are you going to see to your sheep?"

He shook his head.

"No, down to Massetfield. Your mother will be worrying and wondering what has happened."

Petronil did not betray the sudden shame she felt at the trouble she was causing to those who loved her. There is nothing more proud and obstinate than a spirit of selfish sanctity, though Petronil was drawn two ways.

"I might come down with you," she said.

Jasper paused with his hand on the door.

"No; it is better that you should stay here."

And he locked up the cottage and pocketed the key.

It was late when Jasper came to Massetfield, but there was a rushlight burning in the window of Jane Halliday's cottage, and the door stood ajar, as though she sat within, and

was a cottage, and two poor women sat, as though she sat within, and listened. Her plump, round figure appeared in the doorway as Jasper passed under the yew.

"Who be there?"

"I—mother—Jasper."

She met him with a flurry of words.

"She be 'unt here, Jasper. I fear she be taken. Justice Standen and his men

—"

Jasper gave her his news.

"Petronil is with me on the hills."

"Lord, good lad, how did ye come to save her?"

"I made a baby of her against her will, carried her up yonder and locked her in my cottage. And there she shall bide."

Jane Halliday caught his arms.

"That be the way to win a woman. And Jasper, my man, a word in your ear. It be better that she should be your wench, even again her will, than burn for a few words in the air."

They were silent a moment. Then Jasper asked a question.

"It is Pyroos I'm afeared of. Have you heard aught of the man?"

"Will Wake dropped a word here. They had scoured Wallingore, but Preacher Pyroos had taken to his heels, or was hiding in a ditch."

Jasper rubbed his chin.

"I'll be getting back," he said, "she may be scared up yonder."

Jane patted his shoulder.

"Don't ye be too gentle with her, Jasper. She'll like ye the better for being firm."

Jasper Blouie tramped back towards the hills, thinking over Mother Halliday's saying, and wondering what was passing in Petronil's mind. The wind had strengthened, and was roaring dreadfully in the trees. Above, on the hills the furze bushes shuddered and swayed as in fear.

Jasper had the firelit windows of his own cottage in view, when something sprang up under his very feet and went blundering up the hillside. Jasper gave a shout, and started to run after a dim figure that was vanishing into the darkness. He heard a sound of panting in front of him, and the thin, light-shouldered figure of a man showed up against the windows of the cottage.

Jasper ran fast, but the man ran even faster. He appeared to be making for the cottage and its lighted windows as towards a haven of refuge.

The man had reached the door. He was

The man had reached the door. He was beating upon it with both hands, and calling in a hoarse hurrying whisper. The next moment Jasper had him by the collar of his doublet.

The man's face came into the ray of light from one of the windows. It was Master Pycross the Preacher whom he held.

Then Jasper had a vigorous inspiration. He shook Pycross to and fro, and harshened his own voice to an exultant growl.

"Hallo, you accursed heretic. I have hunted ye down, have I! Now we shall sniff the smell of singed flesh."

Pycross broke into wild pleadings.

"Let me go; I am no heretic, but a poor traveller lost on the hills, I took you for a foot-pad."

Jasper shook him.

"No gammon, good Master Pycross. I know your face and your lying tongue. Come away to the Justices."

He picked up the Preacher, slung him across his shoulder as he would have carried a sheep, and walked off with him into the darkness. The shepherd carried Preacher Pycross a mile or more before he pitched him into a mass of thorns and brambles, and left him to kick against the pricks.

Jasper made his way back to the cottage, and unlocked the door to the accompaniment of Harry's shrewd and joyous barking. Passing on the threshold he saw Petronil and the sheepdog huddled together before the fire, the girl's arms around Harry's neck. The grim complacency had gone from her face, and her eyes looked frightened.

"Jasper—is it you?"

"Surely."

"I am glad—so glad you have come back."

She started up, half ran towards him, and then paused with a self-conscious flush of the face. It was the impulsive unspoilt Petronil whom Jasper saw, the girl who had been gay and lovable before the blight of Pycross's piety had fallen on her.

"Why—Petronil—dear heart!"

Impulse conquered, Jasper had her in his arms.

"I have been so frightened. I began to be afraid when you had gone. The wind howled, and the place was full of strange noises. And then—"

Jasper held her very dearly.

"And then?" he repeated.

She hid her face.

"Some one came and beat upon the

"Some one came and beat upon the door, and prayed to be taken in and hidden. It was Master Pycross. They overtook him—here—outside the cottage. And he cried out—and told lies."

Jasper looked grave but innocent.

"Do not vex your heart for the man," he said.

She bridled with quaint unreason.

"Now, Jasper, how can you think—"

"I think many things," he said, laughing, "and one is that sinful folk are sometimes sweeter than the pious."

Parson Bole was reading in his oak room that overlooked the orchard when the maid brought Jasper Stone into his presence. Jasper was wearing his best doublet and hose, and carried a holly sprig in his hat.

Parson Bole turned his chair, and the shrewd little eyes flickered in his great red face.

"Why Jasper, my man—what can I do for ye?"

And Jasper told his tale.

The parson's mouth twitched a little, and his eyes looked aly. Master Bole was a man of understanding. He put a big heart and a stout compassion before the dogmatical details of his creed.

His broad face shone.

"Jasper," said he, "it seems that there were two shepherds claiming this lamb! Bring the child to church with ye, and ye shall have my blessing."

THE HIGHWAYMAN.

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By WARWICK DEEPING,

Author of "Love Among the Ruins,"

"Uther and Igraine," "The

Celebrity," &c.

Captain Carteret sat his horse in a hollow on Harlow Moor, smoking a short pipe, and whistling a playhouse ditty between his teeth. Below him he could see the turnpike road to Morrington curling over the heath to lose itself in a great wood that filled the valley like a pool. Southwards the distant lights of Morrington itself were twinkling out through the deepening twilight.

Captain Carteret was in a cheerful mood. He blew forth clouds of smoke, glanced at the butts of his pistols shining in the holsters, and reflected that the game of "high Toby" was the most pleasant in the world. It was some years since the Captain had been dismissed from his august Majesty's service, and had betaken himself to the roads for spoil and adventure. He was one of the gentlemen of the profession, sleek, sly, and courteous, a man who could do a fine action on occasions, and at least rob with urbanity. He had a great way with the women, it was said, and had once acquitted himself creditably in a duel in defence of a lady's honour.

The conventional crape mask covered the Captain's face. He wore a plain brown coat and dark buckskin breeches, sober colours that enabled him to fit like a brown owl along the hedgerows, and prove a poor mark for blunderbuss or pistol. His horse was a tall, hog-maned roan, a beast that had the temper of 20 witches, and might have run a course with Turpin's Bess. Only three nights ago the Captain had brought off a fat adventure on the Oxford-road. His purse was full and his spirits excellent.

The highwayman straightened in the saddle of a sudden, and heeled his horse forward a few paces as he saw through the twilight a white film of dust rise on the high road down by the wood. He caught the distant clatter of hoofs and the faint rattle of wheels coming up over the heath. Carteret, after knocking the ashes out of his pipe, pulled out his pistols and looked to the priming, and straightened his cravat—for he was something of a dandy. The ghostly film of dust had increased on the high road; the rattle of hoofs came rapidly nearer.

Carteret wheeled his horse out of the hollow and took cover by the roadside behind a bank of furze. He could see

down the hill clearly enough, while it would have required a sharp eye to detect him against the dark background of the moor. The Captain crammed his hat down over his brows, smiled, and made ready with one of his pistols.

"Egad!" he said to himself, as the dust cloud came nearer through the twilight. "They are travelling fast, and up-hill too? What the deuce is in the postboy that he must ruin his horses' winds?"

A post chaise with yellow wheels and the hood up came rattling and swaying along the road behind two sweating horses that were going at a floundering canter. The postillion was using his whip freely, the dust rolling thickly from the whirling wheels. Now and again one of the travellers would lean out from the swaying carriage, and look back down the road as in fear of pursuit.

Captain Carteret pushed out suddenly from his cover and reined in his horse upon the grass by the road. He raised his arm and shouted to the postillion as the chaise came lumbering up. The fellow had taken the highwayman's measure in a moment. He crouched down over his horse's neck, still plying his whip vigorously as though inclined to make a bolt for it, despite the Captain's levelling pistol.

Carteret shouted to him fiercely, and, clapping in his spurs, galloped level with the post horses, while the chaise rocked and swayed along the road. The postillion was eyeing the highwayman anxiously over his shoulder. He saw the pointed barrel of Carteret's pistol as the man on the roan drew level and shouted to him to stop. Conjecturing that the gentleman meant business, and seeing that he was well mounted and no mere buckster bent on bullying people for half-crowns, the postillion held up his whip in token of surrender, and, holding his horses, brought them to a halt.

A streak of flame stabbed the dark suddenly from under the hood of the chaise, and a bullet whistled close above Captain Carteret's hat. The highwayman reined his horse round, with an oath, and covered with his shooting-iron a young man in a black cloak who was leaning forward with a pistol still smacking in his hand. A woman's shrill cry sounded out in the silence of the

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summer evening, and a pair of arms were thrown round the neck of the man in the chaise. Captain Carteret

were thrown round the neck of the man in the chaise. Captain Carteret saw a girl's pale face looking up at him appealingly, as she bent forward and covered her companion's body with her own. "For heaven's sake, sir, don't fire! Have pity."

The girl's terror and the pathetic pleading of her eyes were sufficient to persuade the Captain to be merciful. He was a gentlemanly thief, and prided himself on his courtesy towards women. He raised his hat to the young lady, smiled, and made her a slight bow, keeping a sharp watch, however, on the gentleman whom she was protecting.

"Pray be easy, madam," he said, grandly, "and rest assured that I mean you no harm save the inconvenience of an empty purse."

"Oh! but you will not rob us; no, no!"

Her distress was very sincere, but the Captain bowed to her, and prepared to be professionally implacable.

"Will you advise your gentleman, madam, to deliver up his pistols?"

"He only had the one, sir."

"On your honour?"

"On my honour."

The highwayman dismounted, and approached the chaise, leaving his horse standing by the roadside. He gave a grim look at the postillion as though warning him to play no tricks, and then turned with a bow and smile to those whom the exigencies of life ordained that he should rob. The young gentleman was leaning back in the chaise, looking mortified, miserable, and very sullen. Carteret remarked that he was almost a boy, smooth cheeked and round of face.

The lady was muffled up in a shawl. She also was young, and very comely, so far as the dusk would show. Her lips were moving unconsciously, and her dark eyes were fixed wistfully upon the highwayman's face.

"Will you have pity on us?" she asked.

The Captain bowed and waxed apologetic.

"Most sorry—I am sure, madam," he retorted, "the needs of my profession—you understand. A gentleman of the road must live. It pains me to have to request you to favour me with your money."

"Very sorry to inconvenience you, sir, I'm sure, but—"

"I have only a hundred guineas in notes and gold in my purse."

"I have only a hundred guineas in notes and gold in my purse."

"A hundred guineas are a hundred guineas, sir."

"It is all we have in the world."

"I can sympathise; money's scarce in these days."

"Ah, sir, how would you like to be robbed of all the money you had in the world?"

The Captain shrugged his shoulders and clinked his spurs.

"I hope never to experience the sensation, madam," he said.

"Supposing you were going to be married, sir?"

Carteret stared.

"And the money meant everything, because—because—"

She broke down again suddenly, and sank back in the chaise sobbing, while her companion bent over with a very bulky leather purse clasped in his right hand.

"There—there, Dolly, don't take on so. It can't be helped, my dear, though we're ruined, that's certain."

The young lady still sobbed bitterly, and the man turned with a curse to Carteret.

"Take the money, confound you!" he said.

But the Captain remained motionless.

"Here, take it, and to the deuce with you and all creation. You've spoilt our chance of happiness, if that is any pleasure to you."

The gentleman highwayman was still clinking the spurs and whistling softly to himself, his eyes fixed on the near horse's tail. He ignored the outstretched purse, and stood listening to the sobs that came from the dark corner of the chaise.

"Say, my friend," he asked suddenly, turning his keen eyes full on the younger man's face "what's the game, eh?"

"Game, sir!" quoth the young fellow, looking fierce.

"Gretna Green, eh?"

The man in the chaise blushed in the dusk, and tilted his chin with some haughtiness.

"That's as it may be," he said; "be so good as to take the purse if you must have it, and leave us in peace."

"Yes, it is Gretna Green," she said, "and my father is on the road behind us, and this money is our last hope. I see you are no common fellow, but a true follower of Duval. If you have any pity, any romance in you—"

Carteret broke in upon her with a merry

Carteret broke in upon her with a merry laugh. He was looking admiringly at her passionate and tear-stained face, the dark eyes lustrous and humid, the pouting mouth and dimpled chin upturned to him.

"You want me to let you go, madam?" he asked.

"Yes—yes."

"But what of your bridegroom's bullet? He ought to pay for his shot, madam!"

"Take 50 guineas, 50, and let us pass."

Carteret made her a low bow, still keeping his eyes on the youth and his hand on the pistol.

"Madam," he said, "you are a gallant young lady, and there is but one thing I would ask of you."

"And that?"

"Your name."

The girl blushed and hung her head a little, while the young man in the black cloak looked fiercely in Carteret's face.

"Why should you want to know my name, sir?"

"A mere piece of chivalrous curiosity, madam."

"Well, 'tis Dorothy Ponsonby."

"Not old Sir Toby Ponsonby's daughter?"

"The very same, sir."

The captain drew himself up and whistled. He looked at the bridegroom with a mischievous twinkle in his eyes, and took off his hat to them with a fine flourish.

"I see your bean has pluck—and taste, madam. Sir Toby Ponsonby's daughter indeed! And so you are running away, eh? And may I ask what this young gentleman's profession may be?"

"Richard is an Ensign in the Foot Guards," she said, shyly; "we have saved up all this money between us to run away and get married."

Carteret laughed.

"And Sir Toby is cursing, and whipping up his horses. If he catches you, egad, there will be an end to the romance. If you escape the old gentleman and win the ring, then, my dear madam, your father will bluster, and fume, and forgive you in a month, and Richard will soon be a Colonel. Ha, ha, a merry adventure, to be sure."

Miss Dorothy leant out and laid hand on the Captain's arm.

"You are a knight of the road, sir, and a gentleman, and have you no sympathy with us?"

"By heaven! madam, I have."

"By heaven! madam, I have."

"Ah—"

"Keep your purse, Mr. Richard; you are a lucky dog, sir, and dash it, Gretna Green shall go free. Will your ladyship permit me to kiss your hand?"

Miss Ponsonby leant out of the chaise, and, much to her betrothed's horror, offered the highwayman her lips.

"Heaven bless you, sir," she said.

And Carteret, taking off his hat, kissed her, and then bowed grandly to them both as though he had performed the noblest action of his life.

A sudden cry from the postillion roused the three from this pretty piece of stage play. He had half-wheeled his horse across the road, and was pointing with his whip towards the wood through which they had come. A distant thunder of hoofs and a suggestion of dust rising in the twilight told a tale which neither Carteret nor the lovers could misread. Miss Dorothy gave a shrill cry, and clung to the ensign with a sudden access of terror.

"My father; we shall be overtaken; drive, drive!"

Carteret bent close to her of a sudden with his hat in his hand.

"Madam," he said, very coolly, "I will do my best for you."

"Sir—"

"And when you are married, madam, and a happy mother, as I hope you may be, think sometimes of a poor wretch called Captain Carteret, who never had the love of a decent woman."

"Carteret, the Captain Carteret?"

"I trust you, madam, not to betray me."

He sprang back suddenly towards his horse, and shouted to the postillion as he stood with one foot in the stirrup.

"Drive, whip 'em up, you wretch. Sir Toby Ponsonby's at your heels."

The fellow needed no second bidding, being something of a sportsman, and having the pride thereof. He piked his whip vigorously, and the traces tightened, the chaise darting forward into the dusk. Carteret stood a moment with his hat in his hand, as a white face awayed out towards him, and a hand waved a farewell and a blessing.

"Good-bye, and good luck to you, madam," shouted the Captain, in return.

The chaise with the yellow wheels rolled away over the heath, the postillion cracking his whip and shouting to his horse. Carteret with an amused smile

cracking his whip and shouting to his horses. Carteret, with an amused smile playing about his mouth, sprang into the saddle, and peered southwards into the dusk. He turned his horse aside from the road, and took cover behind the same clump of gorse that had served him when he had stopped Miss Dorothy and her bridegroom. Once more he looked to his pistols, tore off his mask, and crushed his hat down over his face.

The second carriage was coming up the road at a gallop, drawn by a sweating pair of greys that loomed up dimly out of the twilight. The postillion had caught sight of Miss Dorothy's chaise in the distance, and was whipping up his horses, urged on by a Roman-nosed old gentleman in the chariot who wore a blue coat, scratch wig, and cocked hat. There was a servant on horseback following the chaise as it swayed and smoked over the dusty road.

"Zounds," quoth the Captain to himself, "the old beggar is hot on the trail; he means to catch 'em, if he can. Well, Sir Toby, I must have a word with you, and preach you a sermon on fatherly charity."

Carteret waited till the chaise had thundered past, the postillion crouching like a jockey and keeping the post-horses at the top of their speed. Then he swung after them on his great roan, and went stalking up the road after the rattling chaise, with the mounted servant riding at its side. The man, hearing the sound of hoofs behind him, drew in a little, and, twisting in his saddle, saw Carteret on his flank. He gave a shout to the postillion and dived for his pistols, but the Captain was too quick for him. He forced his horse round, gave him the spurs and rammed the beast's chest full against the servant's nag, upsetting them both into the low ditch at the side of the road.

The thing had happened unknown to Sir Toby in the chaise. The groom's horse, after much plunging and rolling, struggled up out of the ditch, leaving his rider crushed and senseless behind him. Carteret halloed and waved his hat at the beast, and sent him cantering away wildly over the heath. The chaise meanwhile had gained a hundred yards more, and the Captain, putting spurs to his horse, galloped after it with right good will.

He shouted lustily as he overhauled the chaise, and waved to the postillion, warning him to stop. The baronet was leaning out of the carriage, staring sus-

pectingly at the stranger whom he had taken at first for his mounted servant. Carteret took off his hat to him, and shouted that Sir Toby's groom had had a fall.

The postillion brought his horses to a standstill, eyeing the Captain shrewdly over his shoulder. Carteret reined in close to the chaise, and bending forward in the saddle, addressed himself with great politeness to Sir Toby.

"I am greatly shocked, sir," he said. "I am afraid I have half killed your servant. I was coming up the road behind him at a brisk canter, when he pulled his horse across right in front of me, and I cannoned him into the ditch. Believe me, I am greatly distressed."

Sir Toby was peering at Carteret angrily, knitting his brows, and wondering whether the stranger was telling the truth or no. He appeared to be a gentleman by his manners and his voice. The baronet felt moved to curse him for the mishap, and growled out a remark about Carteret's clumsiness.

The highwayman was as bland and polite as could be. He appeared honestly concerned at the man's misadventure, and was full of apologies to Sir Toby over the event.

"I can understand your resentment, sir," he said, "and I can only offer you my apologies and my help. Had we not better go back and see whether the fellow is much hurt?"

Sir Toby looked thunder, and supposed that they had.

"Most deuced inconvenient, I can assure you, sir," he growled, as he climbed out of the chaise, "Time's precious; we had better fetch the fellow in."

Carteret had dismounted from his horse. He led the beast by the bridle, and walked down the road at the baronet's side, still apologising profusely, and expressing himself greatly grieved at what had happened.

"No doubt you are in a hurry, sir," he remarked, "and travel on urgent business. I can only deplore the delay my clumsiness has occasioned."

Sir Toby glared at him and plodded on down the road.

"I'm chasing a daughter, sir; that is all," he said.

Carteret's face expressed extreme astonishment.

"Your daughter, sir—an elopement?"

"Yes, sir, an elopement."

"Please accept my heartfelt sympathy."

"Yes, sir, an elopement."

"Please accept my heartfelt sympathy. I am greatly distressed at having blinded you."

"Curse it! sir; so am I," quoth the baronet hotly.

They had come to the place where the highwayman had collided with Sir Toby's servant. The man was lying huddled up in the ditch, unconscious, with his right arm bent under him. Sir Toby knelt down, and took him by the shoulder. He groaned a little, but did not move.

Carteret had sprung again into the saddle.

"I will bring the chaise back," he shouted.

Sir Toby stared at him questioningly, while the Captain, with a pistol twirl of the hat, picked the spurs and cantered up the road. Taking a pistol from his holster as he drew level with the postillion in the dust, he pointed the muzzle at the fellow's head.

"Whip 'em up, my lad," he said.

The man started. Carteret swore at him.

"Whip 'em up, I tell you, or you shall have a bullet through your saddle. Come, full pelt ahead. We must do the best six miles in under the half-hour."

The postillion eyed Carteret's pistol nervously, and obeyed him. He plied his whip suddenly; the horses sprang forward, and the chaise rolled away up the dusty road. Carteret, pitting his pistol back in the holster, gave a loud halloo, and cantered away beside the carriage. Thus they disappeared over the darkening heath, leaving the astonished and indignant baronet swearing and pacing up and down beside the unconscious groom.

The highwayman kept the chaise going at a gallop for three miles or more, and then, coming to cultivated land ordered the postillion to turn aside into a narrow lane. The carriage came to a halt under a high hedge, and the Captain, dismounting, drew a sheath knife from his belt, and cut the traces. Bidding the postillion dismount, he took the fellow's whip from him, and, whipping up the laden horses, he sent them scampering down the lane, with the traces dangling in the mire. Next he ordered the postillion into the carriage, and bade him throw Sir Toby's travelling valise out upon the grass.

"Now, my buck," he said, "just you sit down in the chaise and make yourself comfortable. I am going to see

self comfortable. I am going to see how much cash the old gentleman carries. Keep quiet, or my pistol may be popping off of a sudden."

Carteret, kneeling with his rein over his arm, unstrapped the valise, and turned over the contents. Amid cravats, shirts, a night-cap, and slippers, he discovered a stout leather satchel that gave out a pleasant and satisfactory clink. The highwayman tore it open, finding gold and notes within—spoils that he transferred with an expressive whistle to his own person. Then, slinging the postillion a couple of guineas, he mounted his roan and made off into the dark.

Meanwhile Miss Pousonby and her bridegroom had been rattling through turn-pike gates and past villages, expecting to hear the thunder of Sir Toby's carriage hurtling in their wake. Miss Dorothy was for driving all the night, and scoping for ten minutes at the little town of Halescote, to change horses and snatch a meal; they rolled on again, grudging even so short a delay for fear of the Baronet's paternal wrath. Their dread was unnecessary, had they but known it. Sir Toby had been scrambling and floundering over Harlow Heath in the dark, trying to catch the groom's horse that had hovered near, and growing the more hot and furious in his failure. More than once he had stumbled into a forest bush, and he had ended the chase by walking plump into a muddy pool.

The dawn rose discovering Miss Pousonby and Mr. Richard nearing the village where the emsign's clerical accomplices lived. He was an old friend of the lad's, and had consented to marry him despite Sir Toby. A tall church spire rose above the fields and misty trees; there was a streak of gold in the east. Miss Dorothy, who had been asleep, started up, and clutched her bridegroom's elbow.

"I hear the sound of horse's hoofs," she said.

A cherry balloon came from the road behind them, and the emsign, leaning out of the carriage, saw a horseman come galloping through the morning mist.

"It is all right," he shouted, as he cantered up. "Good-morning to you both. I have persuaded Sir Toby not to follow you. I trust he is safe at Halescote by now."

Carteret's story was soon told, amid much laughter and much professions of gratitude on the lover's side. Miss Dorothy pointed suddenly to the church spire, as she looked up at Carteret with

spire, as she looked up at Carterot with a happy face.

"We are to be married yonder," she said. "Will you not come—and see the end?"

"Madam, I shall be honoured," quoth the highwayman, with a bow.

(The End.)

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THE WOMAN WITH THE WIG

By WARWICK DEEPING



FERMOR was trying to finish that article of his for the *Review*. He had turned his bedroom in the Villa Bonella into a temporary study, and since his window gave on the sea, he had as delightful and soothing an atmosphere before him as a man could desire.

But his bedroom—after the fashion of hotel bedrooms—was connected with the next room by a badly fitting door. Of course the door was locked, but one cannot lock out the sounds of one's neighbour's activities, especially when that particular neighbour happens to be a spinster with a restless temperament and a fondness for humming songs.

And Fermor's neighbour had sprained her ankle two days ago on one of the hill paths. Therefore she had spent much time in her bedroom.

"Confound the woman—I wish she had broken her neck!"

He was fuming, for Miss Neggy—that was her name—was having breakfast in bed, and enjoying it very strenuously. Moreover, kind acquaintances came and knocked at her door and made inquiries.

"Good morning. How is your ankle this morning?"

Miss Neggy would reply in her eager, husky voice:

"Thank you, much better. I am just going to have a little tidy up."

Fermor grated the legs of his chair on the floor.

"Then—for heaven's sake start tidying!" he said quite audibly.

She did. And the splashings and patterings and tune-humming vanquished him. He went below to tell the proprietor that he must change his room.

Fermor was on the edge of a brain-storm when he found Stella Mortimer having breakfast in the lounge hall. Stella Mortimer's great charm lay in her reticence, and in a pair of listening, interested dark eyes. She was on her way home from Rome, and making a lazy pilgrimage of it along the Italian Riviera. Stephen Fermor had also come from

Rome; nor was it a mere coincidence that he also had broken the journey at San Stefano.

"Have you had breakfast?"

"Years ago."

"Well, have another. You look just a little ferocious."

Fermor brought up a chair.

"I'll sit down and be soothed. Changing rooms always annoys me."

"Then why do it?"

"Because that infernal woman who wears a wig happens to be next door to me."

"Don't you like the wig?"

"Oh—come now—don't be scandalous!"

"Well—what is the matter?"

"I think she must wash her teeth ten times a day; and she hums songs always just when I want to finish that article for the *Review*."

"How horrible! Then you should not come to an hotel like the Villa Bonella; you should go to a big, solid monument of a place."

"Well, you would come here," he said with laconic significance.

"I'm sorry."

"Oh—not a bit. Of course—if I had to choose, the *Review* could go to the—"

"Don't be so crude. I told you that you were not to say those obvious things to me—for quite a long while."

"Well—you see—you're so obvious."

"Sir!"

"You know what I mean. If it's a really splendid morning—you can't help noticing it—can you?"

She took another roll from the bread-basket, cut it in half, and calmly lifted the conversation to an absolutely different level.

"Talking about cameos, I bought a really beautiful mock antique the other day."

Stephen Fermor was not in the least interested in cameos, but he was particularly interested in Stella Mortimer. They had met during the winter in Rome.

The Woman with the Wig

its reception given by the Princess Grimaldi, and Fermor had been fascinated. He was a big and rather reserved man, and he detested the average society woman and loathed their perfunctory chatter. And Stella Mortimer had developed an unsuspected gift of equanimity in him, not because she talked so much herself, but because she had a way of making other people feel that they wanted to talk about themselves to her. She liked Fermor, she liked him very seriously, and for all sorts of odd and inconsequential reasons.

"You don't seem interested in my cameo."

"I am perfectly content—here," he answered. "Do you want me to talk?"

She laughed.

"You don't take me with proper seriousness."

"Nonsense. After the hint you gave me the other night—about the ambassador—"

"S-s-sh! I ought not to have told you."

He glanced along the terrace and at the windows of the *salle à manger*.

"There's no one about."

"Thank you; but I prefer to presume that there may be Germans hiding even in the camellia tubs. It never does to take chances with those extraordinarily mean and clever people."

"Anyhow—I do think it's monstrous lucky of you."

"What, to go into a dealer's shop and bargain for an imitation cameo?"

He smiled at her.

"All right; we will consider that to be the question."

Fermor rose. Old Lady Twentyman and her two daughters had appeared with their work-bags and the *Morning Post*, and Fermor abominated the Twentymans.

"I am going down to the town. Can I get you anything?"

"Two tubes of paint—chrome yellow and Prussian blue."

"My Italian shall do its best."

"Thank you."

Fermor had been gone five minutes when an animated chattering and the tapping of two sticks on the polished floor of the salon disturbed Stella in the middle of a day-dream. It was Miss Neggy being assisted out on to the terrace by Fritz, the concierge, and Gemma,

one of the chambermaids. She was answering kind inquiries on the way.

She was a most extraordinary-looking woman, with a long, lean nose, a prim, pursed-up mouth, and a yellow face and chin covered with yellow down. Her bronze wig was a very fine production, but a palpable wig, for all that. Her voice was pitched in a kind of husky falsetto. She was tall and gaunt, with stooping shoulders, and a figure that clamoured for artistic remodelling.

Miss Neggy had been at the Villa Bonella a week, two days less than Stella Mortimer.

"I will have that long chair, Fritz, thank you. Good morning. Isn't it a sweet morning?"

She smiled on Stella. She had taken a great fancy to Stella Mortimer.

And Stella had tried to appreciate Miss Neggy.

"I hope your ankle is better."

"Ever so much better, thank you. Will you please bring me a cushion, Fritz? And a daily paper—an Italian one will do."

When Fermor returned he found Stella Mortimer suffering the eager chatter of the lady with the wig.

Her eyes asked him to rescue her.

"I'm awfully sorry, but I couldn't get those tubes of paint. Couldn't make the woman understand. I found the shop, though. If you'd care to walk down to the Via Vittoria—"

"Thanks so much. Yes, I'll come. I'll go and put on a hat."

Miss Neggy smiled engagingly at Fermor.

"Perhaps you would be so very kind as to buy me some cakes—for tea. Just four little cakes and one macaroon—"

"Oh, certainly."

He waited for Stella in the vestibule, and they passed out into the shade of the ilexes that grew on either side of the road.

"Oh—that old woman!"

She spoke as though her teeth had been set on edge.

"Pretty horrible, I grant you."

"She fills me with a quite extraordinary feeling of repulsion. I don't know why. It isn't her ugliness. Something strange—"

"In what way?"

"When she comes near me I want to

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get as far away as possible. I have a sort of horror that she is going to touch me. It's as though she were unclean."

"Perhaps she is," said Fermor laconically. "Snub her brutally. I'm ready to do it for you, if you like."

They forgot Miss Neggy in the splendour of the sunshine, and in the crowded life of San Stefano. It was market morning, and the Piazza Vittoria smelt of vegetables and humanity.

The movement and the colour of the place delighted Stella; it was the real thing, noisy, strenuous, coarsely cheerful, so unlike the cultivated languor of an hotel lounge.

A huge German, with a face like a round of raw beef and a figure like a gourd, bore towards them. His eyes were fixed on a bookstall, and since Stella stood in his direct path to the stall, he jostled her as he passed.

Fermor turned with a sudden flare of the eyes.

"I'm going to teach that——"

"No, no." She laid a hand on his arm. "They always behave like that."

Her eyes appealed to him.

"Don't make a scene, Stephen. If one quarrelled with every German who behaved like a pig, travelling would be nothing but a series of altercations. We haven't done our shopping yet."

She made a move up the Via Vittoria. The big German seemed to be quite unconscious of the fact that he had offended anybody. He was turning over the books on the stall, and grunting imperiously in crude Italian at the proprietor.

Fermor looked at him longingly, with the eye of a fighter who had picked out the ideal place for a blow.

"You ought to have let me chasten that beast. I could have done it quite nicely. My German is fairly pungent."

She smiled.

"Why trouble? He would only have been astonished. They are just elephants. Besides——"

"Well?"

"I want to avoid Germans. They are too monstrously clever; they find out everything. No one ought to be able to suspect that I——"

She paused.

"All right; I'm not in the secret service."

"Nor am I. But I take my responsi-

bility very seriously. Oh, here's our shop."

* * *

No one would have thought the Villa Bonella capable of producing anything that could be described as sensational or dramatic. The proprietor was the most honest of creatures; many of the servants had been there for years, and the visitors were mostly aristocrats.

Yet two days later Stella Mortimer waited in the hall for Stephen Fermor.

"Have you ten minutes to spare?"

"Of course."

"Come with me." She led him to a quiet corner, where no one could approach without being seen.

"What's the trouble?"

"Someone has been in my room."

"Thieving?"

"Going through my boxes."

"How do you know?"

A great part of her charm lay in her sympathetic tranquillity, but this morning her brown eyes had an anxious look, and Fermor's devotion rose in arms.

"Why not tell me—about the whole business? Or make me responsible, and tell me just as much as you please?"

Her face softened.

"I shall have to trust somebody, Stephen."

"A healthy egotism compels me to suggest——"

"It had been done so cleverly."

"What had?"

"The way my room had been searched. It must have happened yesterday—when we were out at San Lorenzo. I had purposely arranged things in my boxes so that I should know if anything had been touched."

"Well?"

"Everything was much as I had left it, but a satin sache had been turned the other way up."

"How do you know?"

"It is pink on one side, white on the other. I had left the pink uppermost on purpose. It had been changed."

"Just a bad bit of bad observation on somebody's part. You missed nothing?"

"Nothing."

"Then it was not an ordinary thief."

"Oh, no."

"What were they after?"

She did not answer him for a moment, and he watched her face intently.

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"You are going to trust me, dear?"
Her eyes glimmered with sudden light.
"Somehow I feel I must. If I suggest that I happen to be the carrier of very important secret dispatch, you may understand——"

He whistled softly.

"You are taking the risk? But, my dear child——"

"Isn't it reasonable? Who would suspect a casual, *dolce far niente* globe-trotter of carrying dynamite? This thing might explode the whole of Europe."

"Do you mean to say Sir Roden——"

"Sir Roden is a genius. And yet they seem to have found out——"

"Who?"

She hummed "*Deutschland über alles*."

Fermor began to look grim.

"Do you suspect any particular person?"

"I haven't an idea. Of course, Fritz and one or two of the waiters——"

"Too obvious."

"Just so."

"And where is this——"

She touched her bosom, and Fermor frowned.

"Look here, dear, if you are going to trust me, you had better let me carry the thing."

"What difference would that make? They suspect me; I'm responsible."

He saw the complete reasonableness of her argument, and it only made him more anxious.

"Yes, that's sound. The best thing is for you to move on at once. I'll travel with you."

"Bad policy again."

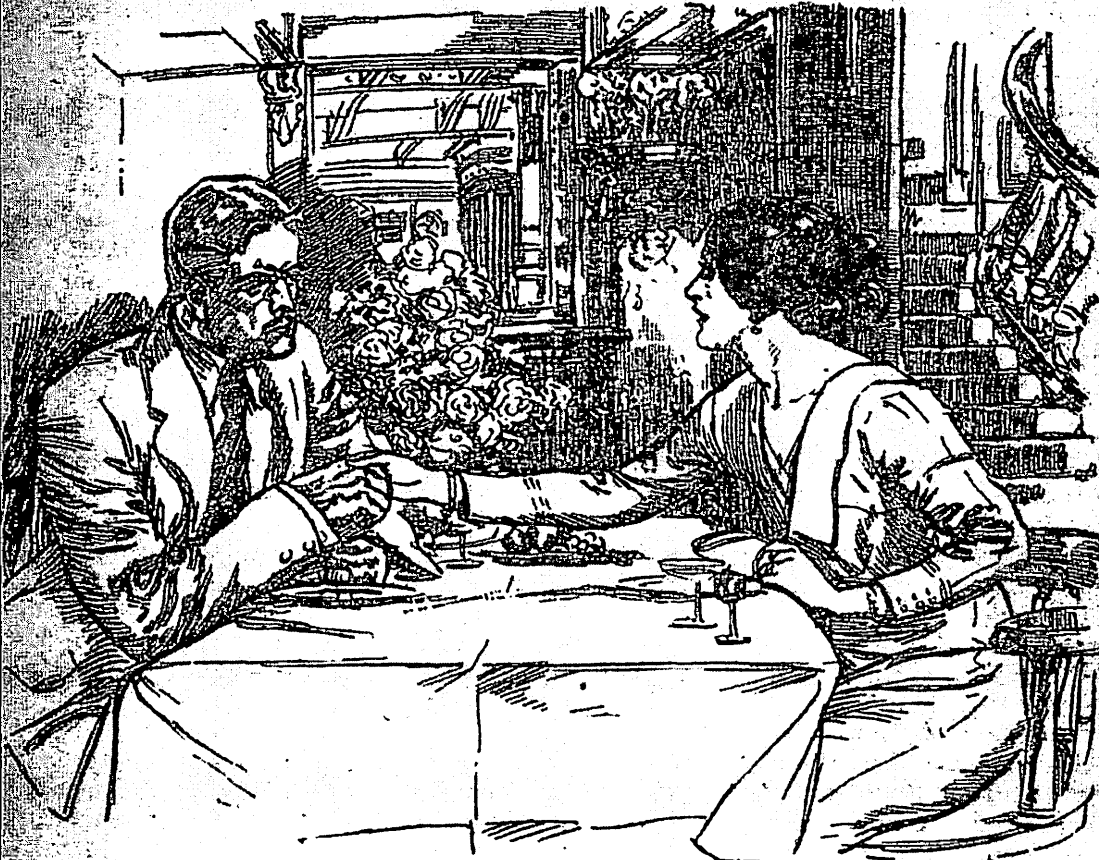
"Why?"

"They would realise that I was nervous. It would strengthen their suspicions. No. I must keep up the appearance of being a casual, vagrant Englishwoman."

Courage always counts, and Stephen Fermor's pride in her refused to remain mute.

"That's very plucky of you. I wonder why it is that the quiet people always stand up well to a crisis?"

"I should never call you garrulous!"



"It is good to be able to trust in a man," she said

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"I am not admiring myself. Say that we are comrades over this."

She gave him her hand, and he kissed it.

"It is good to be able to trust in a man," she said.

* * * * *

Fermor said nothing to Stella, but he once more complained about the noisiness of his room, and an accommodating proprietor laboured to humour him. Stella's room was No. 32 on the second floor; Fermor, after being shown several vacant rooms, chose No. 29. He wanted to be near her, for strange things happen to people who dare to dabble in the mysteries of the diplomatic underworld.

Leaning over the window-rail after rearranging his belongings, he had a complete view of the terrace.

People were reading and basking in the sunshine. He noticed Stella Mortimer's blue sunshade, and beside it the gleam of Miss Neggy's wonderful bronze wig.

Miss Neggy was knitting and talking to her neighbour. Her jerky animation was just a little ridiculous.

Fermor was watching Miss Neggy's hands. For some reason or other they had roused a vague and questioning interest in him. He had seen women's hands at work, but Miss Neggy's hands did not make him think of a woman. And then, suddenly, he held his breath as an absurd yet startling notion struck him. Common sense should have suggested to Fermor that he ought to have laughed at his own fancifulness, but common sense often overlooks the amazing eccentricities of life.

Then he saw Stella get up and move away. He remembered how the old woman repelled her.

Miss Neggy went on knitting, and Fermor could hear the clicking of her needles.

That same evening he passed her in the vestibule. She was helping herself along with two sticks, and she grinned at him amiably.

"Good evening, Mr. Fermor. Yes, I am actually going for a walk. Isn't it venturesome of me?"

He answered, curtly: "Very." Did the old fool think that any passionate male would seize her and carry her off for the joy of possessing her beauty! But was she such a fool? Fermor was

following a certain eccentric and surprising line of thought.

And in following it he followed Miss Neggy out through the garden and through the gate that opened on the mule path. She pattered along in front, limping a little and using her two sticks, and Fermor dawdled at a safe distance, keeping out of view. The mule path was not exactly the sort of track that was suited to an elderly gentlewoman with a game foot.

The path left the olive groves and insinuated itself into a grove of stone pines. "The old lady is pretty energetic!"

Fermor found himself quickening his pace in order to keep her in view.

Then he made a discovery that electrified him. She was not using her sticks—in fact, she was forgetting to use them. That sprained ankle of hers was an illusion.

From that moment Fermor ceased to be a precise and dignified man of the upper classes. The instincts of the boy and the hunter were in command, bidding him do things that are usually associated in our days with the cinematograph. He abandoned the path, and plunged adventurously into the pine wood, going at a trot, and keeping well down the slope of the hill so that he was hidden from anyone walking along the path. When this flanking movement was complete he turned up hill, keeping his head low, and taking advantage of all cover. The wood was dotted with arbutus bushes, and the sun shone behind him.

His luck was in. The ground rose to a sharp ridge and then fell away again towards the path, and an obliging smother of arbutus boughs raised a dark screen. Fermor crawled up on all-fours to reconnoitre.

Then he bobbed his head abruptly. Miss Neggy was not twenty yards from him; she was walking to and fro with long, unfeminine strides, and gesturing with one of her sticks as though it were a sword. Fermor lay low, and meditated.

"Der Teufel——!"

Fermor held his breath. She was swearing fluently and forcibly in German, and her voice had changed. It was rasping as the voice of a drill-sergeant. All this was very interesting.

Suddenly a second voice joined itself

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to hers, a voice that made apologies and offered explanations. Fermor raised his head cautiously in time to see Miss Neggy brandishing one of her sticks over the head of Fritz, the concierge.

Fermor took cover again and listened, and thanks to a fair knowledge of German he was able to follow what was said. Fritz was describing a vain quest after something that appeared to be of immense importance, a something that was supposed to be in the possession of a certain Englishwoman.

Miss Neggy cut him short.

"You could not find it anywhere. Of course not. Was it to be expected? She carries it about with her."

"She never goes out alone," Fritz said, "but always with that tall English fellow. Otherwise——"

"Have you got that key?"

"Here it is."

"Very good. Now listen to me. You will have to be awake to-night; you will have to let me out of the hotel at about three in the morning. I shall walk to meet Schmidt's villa; he will have his car ready."

Fermor listened a little longer, and then crawled cautiously away. He had heard enough.

About a hundred yards above the hotel he met Stella Mortimer.

"Splendid! I was coming to look for you."

"What have you been doing? My dear man, look at your trousers!"

He laughed.

"Too much hurry! What a fool!"

He brushed the soil from his knees, talking the while in cautious undertones.

"I have been doing a little scouting. Quite amusing and instructive. I have not to sleep in your room to-night."

"Stephen!"

"Beg pardon. What an idiot I am! I mean, you must give up your room to me and take mine——"

"What—are—you talking about?"

"I'm quite sane. But look here—it would be better if you could manage to share someone else's room. There's Molly Davidson, an absolutely sound woman. You see—no one must know."

"But what——?"

"And we must arrange to move to-morrow, right through to Paris and across the Channel. It's imperative——"

She laid her hand on his arm.

"Stephen, what on earth does all this mean?"

"Only that someone contemplates invading your room to-night—in order to steal a certain document. And I'm going to be there."

"Who is it?"

"I'll tell you to-morrow."

She looked into his eyes.

"But supposing——?"

"Well?"

"I won't let you take the risk."

"Dear, I'm afraid you can't do that. I want to thrash a most infernal scoundrel—thrash him for your sake. Don't worry. I can arrange things perfectly."

She still hesitated.

"But supposing the beast is armed? Why not tell the police——?"

"And spoil your secret—and my adventure? No. Besides, dear, I'm rather pleased——"

"Pleased?"

"Well—you see—I admire your pluck immensely, and I admire——"

She glanced at him warningly.

"Steve, there are the Palmerstones! Oh, yes, you may talk to me to-morrow. I'm beginning to be a little scared——"

"No need, I assure you. Go and see Miss Davidson, and tell her part of the truth. I'll swear that she is to be trusted. You'll have to give me your key."

"All right."

"And make arrangements to catch the morning express."

"I will."

* * * * *

It was about ten o'clock when Fermor slipped into Stella's room and locked the door after him. He had watched Stella go upstairs with Miss Davidson. Miss Neggy was still in the lounge, knitting and chatting to two old ladies.

Fermor had plenty of mother-wit. He took a pair of Stella's shoes, unlocked the door, and thrust them out into the passage. If Fritz came along spying, those shoes might lead him to conclude——

Fermor smiled.

The electric switch was on one side of the door, and he knew where to put his hand on it.

He left the light burning for the best part of an hour, and then set a chair with its back to the wall, so that when

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the door opened, anyone sitting there would be hidden.

Fermor's vigil was a long one. He heard the whole hotel go to bed, and once he fancied some stealthy soul paused a moment outside his door. Silence descended. The chair began to assert itself, to insist upon its uncompromising hardness.

Then he heard a metallic sound within two yards of his ear. Someone had come along the corridor with amazing quietness and had slipped a key into the lock of Stella Mortimer's door.

Fermor stood up, blessing the chair for not creaking. He heard the door open, saw its dark solidity swing back and cover him. He had that right fist of his drawn back ready to strike.

Fermor judged the distance perfectly. The intruder went sprawling sideways, and Fermor slammed the door to and grabbed at the switch. The sudden light showed him Miss Neggy, wigless and in a plum-coloured dressing-gown, stretched out in disorder.

"Ah—would you!"

He plunged, got hold of an arm that was groping for something, and twisted it till the shoulder sinews cracked. A very useful-looking knife fell to the floor.

Fermor kicked it aside, and heaved the lady in the dressing-gown to her feet. And for a woman she showed sudden and remarkable strength and ferocity, striking out at Fermor with both fists.

He blocked the blows with his elbows, and getting a grip of purple cloth and white calico, rent the stuff from throat to waist. There was nothing feminine about Miss Neggy. As he expected—he had caught a man.

His wrath was ironical and grim. He spoke in German.

"I'm sorry, Fraulein, but you will have more than a sprained ankle to-morrow!"

What Fermor did to that German genius no one but the German doctor who was sent for next day ever knew. There was a dislocated jaw, so that the lady could not speak; both her eyes were closed, and her nose broken. Mystery surrounded the whole affair; Miss Neggy disappeared suddenly from the hotel, and Herr Schmidt, at the big villa down the road, received a very much battered guest.

Not till the Paris express had carried

them across the frontier would Fermor satisfy Stella's curiosity. She had packed overnight, and on going to her own room in the morning she had found nothing to indicate that anything violent had happened.

They were standing at the end of the corridor, watching the mountainous and snow-brilliant Alpine country slide past. The rattle of the train made it impossible for conversation to be overheard.

"Don't be so selfish, Stephen. Do tell me."

"What am I to tell you?"

"Did anything happen last night?"

"Oh, yes, something happened. Someone invaded your room."

"Who was it?"

"Miss Neggy."

She looked at him with supreme astonishment.

"Miss Neggy! And what did you do?"

"I either broke or dislocated her jaw, closed up both her eyes, and inflicted various sorts of damage."

"But—good heavens!"

She looked shocked, and he laughed heartily.

"Miss Neggy was a man, Stella."

"Oh—nonsense!"

"Should I have knocked a woman about? She was a man, and a particularly vicious man with a nice, murderous knife. For a German the fellow was a genius. He had hit off the eccentric English spinster to perfection."

Stella was gripping the brass hand-rail and staring out of the window.

"How horrible!"

He touched her shoulder.

"That explained your feeling of disgust. One's instincts are wiser than one's mere world knowledge. Well, it's over now. We have scored—and fooled them pretty badly. I don't think they will follow us up."

He was feeling very protective towards her, and somehow she seemed to understand the feeling and to welcome it.

"Men are very useful creatures—at times, Stephen."

"Dear—I want it to continue."

"What?"

"My general utility. You know—I—"

The corridor was empty, and no one saw them kiss.

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF CAPTAIN JELlicoe.

BY WARWICK DEEPING,

Author of "Love Among the Ruins," "A Woman's War," "Bertrand of Brittany," "The Rust of Rome," &c., &c.

The green door in the red house opened, and Sophia Lascelles came out, wearing her big straw bonnet, her white gown flowered with pink roses, and her little cross-laced shoes. Her black ringlets hung down either side of her demure yet provoking face, and as she walked along the raised footway near the abbey wall, she did not trouble to look at young Stephen Hillsdon, old Zachary Hillsdon's son, who was standing at the surgery window measuring laudanum into a glass.

Young Stephen had to keep one eye on the glass, but the other tried to follow Sophia. Laudanum and love refused to mingle, and the measuring glass and the bottle went down on the counter with a bang.

"I should just like to know where she's going."

Stephen was rather a swarthy young man, and he did not look in the best of tempers as he pressed close to the window and watched Sophia's white figure drifting along against the grey of the old wall.

"If that confounded red-coat—"

He turned suddenly, seized his beaver that hung on a peg behind the surgery door, and went striding out into the street. His blue coat and white breeches had been made by a country tailor, and his boots were massive and built for the mud of country lanes and fields. Young Stephen Hillsdon had been in love with Sophia for two long years. The whole town knew it, and laughed not unkindly. But Miss Sophia was a coquette—and then—there were the officers of his Majesty's 10th Dragoons.

Stephen followed the figure in the white dress powdered with pink roses. He was frowning, and thinking perhaps of dashing Captain Jellicoe—that most elegant officer who carried his head very high and had

who carried his head very high and had such gallant manners.

"Confound it! What am I afraid of?"

He quickened his pace, and his heavy boots made a resounding noise along the stone-paved footwalk under the High Elms. Little Miss Primley, peeping out of her window, saw Stephen Hillsdon go by, his eyes staring hard after Miss Sophia Lascelles.

Miss Primley sighed.

"Poor Stephen! The captain is such a fascinating man!"

Stephen overtook Sophia just by Beggars Walk, where the old pump stood, with its tall iron railings. Sophia had heard his heavy footsteps following her, for Stephen had a very decisive tramp of his own, but she did not pause or turn her head. It was not till he had drawn level, and was lifting his hat, that she chose to realise that he was there.

"La, Mr. Hillsdon, is it you?"

One demure eye looked at him with innocent surprise, but Stephen was not in the best of tempers.

"Why 'Mr. Hillsdon'—all of a sudden—?"

"But you are—Mr. Hillsdon—young Mr. Hillsdon, aren't you?"

He swung along at her side, conscious of the fact that she took a strange pleasure in provoking him.

"Stephen yesterday—Mr. Hillsdon to-day. Of all the capricious—"

She held up an admonitory finger.

"Now, Stephen, I'll not be scolded. The truth is, you are far too fond of scolding people. One might think you wore such heavy boots because—"

"They are honest boots."

She went off into a trill of laughter.

"Oh, what a serious young man. Mr. Stephen Solemnboots, I assure you."

He had gone nearly as red as Captain Jellicoe's coat, and his chin was up in the air.

"Some people will laugh at anything."

"Anything! I think that you are something."

"I am not a man to be trifled with, let me tell you."

"Stephen!"

She gave him a flash of the eyes this time, a glance that had pride as well as

time, a glance that had pride as well as laughter.

"Stephen, don't scold. Be very careful. It is better that I should laugh at you sometimes than—"

"Than?"

"Than that you should make me angry. You are a little too rough, Mr. Stephen Hillsdon. In fact, at times you would like to be a bully."

"Bully! I a bully?"

"Yes, a bully!"

He looked incredulous. They had been walking along Carter-lane, and had just turned into the Market-square, where the grey cobbled space was shut in by red brick houses. A few idlers were lounging about the steps of the market house, and under the portico of the White Hart Inn two or three cavalry officers stood chatting together. One of them turned to cross the square as Sophia Lascelles and Stephen Hillsdon walked out of Carter-lane.

It was Captain Jellicoe, the inimitable Captain Jellicoe, who stood six feet without his cavalry boots, and had the head of an Apollo.

The gay dragoon came swinging across the market square straight towards Sophia Lascelles. Stephen, stealing a glance at her, thought that her face flushed a little under the big straw bonnet. He stared hard at the approaching figure in red, and felt a savage desire to quarrel with Captain Jellicoe, with Sophia, and with the whole town.

The sweep of Captain Jellicoe's salute was a study in deportment. His hard eyes softened when he smiled at a woman, and his smile seemed to suggest the consciousness of an inevitable conquest.

Miss Lascelles, this is a happy morning.

She looked at him with a mischievous glitter of the eyes.

"Some good news, Captain Jellicoe? How glad I am."

"All news is good news. It was the happy chance of my being off duty."

She laughed and turned towards Stephen, who was standing by looking stolid and sullen.

"You know Mr. Stephen Hillsdon, Captain Jellicoe?"

Jellicoe gave Stephen a casual and patronising look which said as plainly as possible: "Old Zachary Hillsdon cub and bottle washer. What does the oaf mean by getting into such good company?"

"Good day, Mr. Hillsdon."

He nodded to Stephen, stared him un

Good day, Mr. Hillsdon.
He nodded to Stephen, stared him up and down, and seemed amused by his boots.

"Good day, Jellicoe!"

"I beg your pardon, sir. I am—Captain Jellicoe."

"As you please, sir. I am delighted to meet you, sir."

Sophia glanced from one to the other. Her eyes came to rest warningly on Stephen's.

"Any news of the French, Captain Jellicoe?"

"Unfortunately, no, Miss Lascelles. If only this much talked of invasion would come about."

"Captain Jellicoe, please don't frighten us! You soldiers are so reckless and daring."

"We are brave men, Miss Lascelles, and since Englishwomen are so beautiful, why, we are ten times the braver."

"Oh, Captain Jellicoe!"

"Oh, Captain Jellicoe!"

Stephen mimicked her, his eyes beginning to glitter.

The captain turned on him sharply.

"You will be in no danger, sir. Don't be alarmed. You can stay quietly at home—and mix up nice draughts for the Frenchmen."

"And a little Dutch courage for the King's dragoons."

Jellicoe's face grew threatening and insolent.

"Be very careful, sir. No one is allowed to jest with the honor of the King's forces."

Sophia intervened.

"Stephen—you are incorrigible. He is always trying to plague people. You must not take him seriously. Captain Jellicoe. And Stephen—you ought to be at Widow Samson's in Carter Lane. You told me—she expected you to bleed her son at eleven o'clock. I have to buy muslins at Pen-therby's. Captain Jellicoe—you have such an eye for colors—"

The captain was charmed.

"Permit me to lay my poor taste at your feet. Mr. Hillsdon, Widow Samson must be in the fidgits—"

"It is ten minutes past eleven, Stephen."

The young surgeon gave her one look, turned his back on them, and walked off with squared shoulders.

Stephen Hillsdon forgot all about the hypothetical widow Samson and her son,

and striding home to the white house in the Abbey Walk resumed the mixing up of the medicines he had left in order to follow Sophia. Now Stephen was no fool, which made his anger all the grimmer. He kept asking himself whether Sophia was a mere coquette, or whether she seriously

was a mere coquette, or whether she seriously favored Captain Jellicoe. Sophia was so much her own mistress, her mother being wholly under her sway, that Stephen knew that Miss Lascelles would go her own sweet way.

But was she serious? That was the question.

Stephen Hillsdon might be a shrewd young man, but he had had no great experience of the ways of women. Therefore when he presumed to call on Mrs. Lascelles that same afternoon, and managed to discover that Sophia was alone in the garden, he opened an attack that threatened to end in an ignominious repulse.

He had found Sophia, basket on arm, wandering up and down the gravel walks between the box edges, and snipping roses from the standards with a pair of her mother's scissors. And Stephen, it must be confessed, went to work rather clumsily; so clumsily that Sophia's pride took up arms against him.

"Stephen! I should never have thought you capable of such meanness!"

They had reached the summer house, and she stood in the middle of the path, so that he could not escape.

"Meanness?"

"Yes, meanness. How dare you talk to me like this? What right have you to come here, and hint that—"

His anger began to match hers.

"I came as a friend—"

"Friend? Friend, indeed!"

He became fiercely emphatic.

"I said that I came as a friend—"

"A kind of elderly, fatherly person! Very well, Mr. Stephen Hillsdon, I will take you at your word."

"I ask nothing else."

"I will regard you as a friend, ever and always—just as a friend. You understand?"

He did understand, and saw himself in a corner. But he was sufficiently angry to set up his pride against hers.

"Very well, Miss Lascelles. Please regard me always as your most sincere friend."

"Thank you, Mr. Hillsdon. I will always remember to regard you in that light. But, please, do not try and be too candid, or I may even forget you as a friend."

He bowed to her, hiding his exasperation at the way she had outwitted him.

"Miss Lascelles, I shall always be at your service. Good-day."

The first thing that Stephen Hillsdon did when he reached home was to take down a dusty case that was kept on the top of the bookshelf in the surgery. The

down a rusty case that was kept on the top of the bookshelf in the surgery. The case contained a couple of duelling pistols, with powder flask, bullet mould, and a bag of bullets. Stephen cleaned the pistols, put them back in the case, and hid the case in his bedroom.

Farmer Starbright had an old orchard down by the river at the back of his big waggon shed, and Farmer Starbright was a friend of Stephen's. There was an old pear tree with a pile of faggots beyond it on the other side of the orchard hedge, and Stephen made the trunk of the pear tree his target, planing up a piece of paper about the size of a man's head. Stephen had a steady hand, and his pistol shooting became deadly.

Sometimes Farmer Starbright would come out early and watch him and nod his head and wink.

"Five out of six, right on the mark! I reckon you will be murdering someone soon!"

Stephen kept his secrets to himself.

As for Captain Jellicoe, he remained the same fascinating person, and the town became aware of the fact that he was being very attentive to Miss Sophia Lascelles. Mrs. Lascelles had a comfortable sum of money in the bank, owned a farm or two and the house she lived in. Jellicoe had nothing much beyond his pay, and the money he won at cards.

Stephen Hilladon had had his suspicions of the man, and about that time one of two coincidences confirmed them. Peter Trigg the wine merchant, had something to say about Jellicoe's intrigues, and something more to say about his debts. It was whispered that he was not much loved by his brother officers, and that he was suspected of cheating at cards. Stephen Hilladon heard all these rumors, and bided his time and waited.

When he and Sophia met—it was.

"How do you do, Mr. Hilladon."

"Good morning, Miss Lascelles. I hope you are very well."

She seemed quite undisturbed in his presence, and determined to keep him to the promise he had made her. Once or twice he met her walking with Captain Jellicoe, and he had to hold himself in, and meet Jellicoe's insolent stare without betraying the anger that was in him. He took more delight in his pistol practice after these meetings, and his shooting seemed to become more deadly.

It was about the end of July that Stephen Hilladon's great chance came to him. Two friends of his, Matthew Saunderson, a young attorney, and Squire Enderby, had kept their eyes and ears at his service, having no more love than he had for the inimitable Captain Jellicoe. They told him that Jellicoe had been

They told him that Jellicoe had been heard to boast of his success with Sophia Lascelles, and that he had said openly that he could marry her just when he pleased.

Stephen Hilladon began to frequent the White Hart howling green. The White Hart was a popular resort of the officers of the 10th Dragoons, where they would sit round the little tables under the lime trees and drink their wine and smoke their pipes. Stephen always chose a table in a little arbour off the main walk where he could watch all that passed without being conspicuous himself.

It so happened that Matthew Saunderson and Enderby were with Stephen in the arbour when Captain Jellicoe sat down at a table well within earshot of his rival. Cards and wine were brought, and two young cornets had consented to play with him. Jellicoe won, and as he won he drank more wine, and as he drank he began to talk unguardedly. He fell to recounting some of his love adventures to show these youngsters what a fine dog he was, and before he had finished—he had compromised the name of Miss Sophia Lascelles.

Stephen rose suddenly, glanced meaningfully at his friends, and walked out of the arbour. He went to the captain's table, picked up a pack of cards, and threw them slap into Jellicoe's face.

Jellicoe sprang up, overturning his chair. He was red both with wine and anger, and his eyes flared.

"What the—"

Stephen was very white and quiet. The two cornets had risen and were staring at him, and Enderby and Saunderson had come out of the arbour.

"Captain Jellicoe, you are a liar and a coward—"

"By George—I will teach you—you young sawbones—to insult an officer of the King's Army."

"I am at your service, sir."

Jellicoe squared up, but several of his brother officers gathered round, and drew him aside. Stephen remained standing by the table, and Enderby and young Saunderson joined him.

A red faced, middle aged officer came across from the group of red coats about Captain Jellicoe.

"You have attacked Captain Jellicoe's honor, sir—"

"I have called him a liar—and a coward."

"Then you will have to fight him, sir."

"I am at his service at any time and in any place."

Now it so happened that Sophia Las-

in any place.

Now it so happened that Sophia Lancelles's maid was being courted by one of the post boys belonging to the White Hart Inn, and everyone in the stable yard of the White Hart knew that Captain Jellicoe and Mr. Stephen Hillsdon were going to fight a duel. Some said it was to be in the Beacon field; others in the Mill meadow; but John, the post boy, who had listened behind a hedge, knew that it was to be in the old quarry on Squire Enderby's land. Sophia's maid heard all about it before the evening was out, and Sophia heard of it from her maid.

"Captain Jellicoe and Mr. Hillsdon he for shooting of each other at six to-morrow mornin'."

"What do you mean, Rose?"

Rose told all that she knew.

"I'm sure it be terrible, Miss. The captain will surely shoot poor Mr. Stephen."

"I wonder what it can be about?"

"I wonder—Miss."

"Where are they going to fight?"

"Tom told me, in Squire Enderby's old quarry down by the firwood."

Sophia kept her thoughts and her emotions to herself. She dismissed Rose, telling herself that she would have to sit up all night if she wished to make sure of preventing this duel in the morning.

Stephen Hillsdon woke about dawn, and springing out of bed, went and stood at the bedroom window. The window looked out into the walled garden at the back of Zachary Hillsdon's house, and the dew of a still summer dawn was upon the grass and the flowers. Against the yellow east Stephen could see the outline of a distant firwood, the wood near which he was to fight Captain Jellicoe in about two hours' time. He found himself thinking of Sophia, and wondering whether she would be sorry if anything happened to him, and whether she would suspect that he had fought in her cause.

He began to dress, as silently as he could, for he did not wish to wake the old people who knew nothing of his quarrel with Jellicoe. What astonished him most was the fact that he was not in the least afraid. He felt as calm and as unflurried as though he was going out for an early swim in Farmer Starbright's pool.

"My hand ought to be steady," he said to himself.

He held it out, and could not discover a tremor.

Stephen crept downstairs, carrying his boots in his hands. He had dressed himself in black, so that he would make less of a mark for the soldier's pistol. He lit a wood fire in the kitchen, made himself some coffee, and ate some bread and honey. Then he put on his boots and his best

Then he put on his boots and his best beaver, took the case of pistols, and unlocking the garden door, went out through the garden into the lane that led down towards the fields.

The whole place was still asleep—not a soul was stirring, for he was very early—earlier than he need have been. He waited by the first stile over the fields, for Sanderson was to meet him there. Stephen sat on the stile, swinging his heels. He had been there about ten minutes when he heard someone utter his name.

"Well, Stephen?"

He started round, to find Sophia standing there, her eyes looking at him gravely from under her straw bonnet. The grass had deadened the sound of her footsteps, and she had stolen on him without his hearing her.

Stephen stood up and pulled off his hat.

"Good morning!"

"You are very early, Stephen?"

"Yes, I am rather early."

"Will you tell me why you are going to Squire Enderby's quarry?"

He flushed, and looked at her steadily.

"Perhaps you know."

"Perhaps I do. You are not going, Stephen?"

His mouth hardened.

"Pardon me—I am! I have called a certain person a liar and a coward—"

"Why did you call him a liar and a coward?"

"That is my own affair."

"Tell me—"

"I cannot."

"Stephen—you must."

"I am afraid there is no must about it."

The sound of someone clearing his throat with discreet ostentation made them turn and discover young Mr. Sanderson hurrying down the path towards the stile. He looked hot and a little excited, and appeared to have been running.

He pulled off his hat and gave Sophia a rather awkward bow.

"There's to be no diving match this morning, Stephen."

"Oh!"

Sanderson winked at him.

"Percival met me up yonder. There's no match."

"Do you mean—?"

"Their best man can't turn out."

Sophia was watching them with a look of dry amusement.

"Mr. Sanderson, please don't be so mysterious; I know all about it."

"Oh, indeed!"

"So there is to be no duel?"

Mr. Sanderson glanced at Stephen.

"So there is to be no duel?"

Mr. Saunderson glanced at Stephen.

"No; there is to be no duel."

"I should like to know why?"

The young attorney straightened up with a touch of impatience.

"Well, simply because the other man has run away."

"Captain Jellicoe has run away?"

"He wasn't to be found this morning."

She burst out laughing of a sudden, and their solemn faces seemed to amuse her.

"Oh, you cruel men, frightening poor Captain Jellicoe out of his wits. I am sure you ought to be ashamed of yourselves."

Stephen looked haughty.

"Captain Jellicoe is a scoundrel!"

Saunderson chimed in.

"Let me assure you, Miss Lascelles, that the man is not only a coward, but --"

She waved her hands.

"Yes--yes; but will you tell me why you were going to fight a duel with Captain Jellicoe?"

She looked at Saunderson, and Saunderson shrugged his shoulders, and passed the responsibility to Stephen Hilladon.

"I think Stephen should tell you, Miss Lascelles."

"Well, Stephen will tell me."

"Meanwhile, I think I had better walk on and warn Squire Enderby."

And he had the sense to leave them alone together.

Sophia looked at Stephen as though she were very grieved with him, but deep down in her eyes there was a glimmer of tenderness.

"I must ask you to see me home, Stephen."

He bowed to her and put himself at her side.

"And also--why you were going to fight Captain Jellicoe?"

He strolled along with his chin in the air.

"The man was telling lies, boasting away somebody's honour."

"Ah, I see! And who was it, Stephen?"

"Someone."

"Was it me?"

He did not look at her, and she gave a queer little laugh, and laid her hand on his arm.

"Thank you, Stephen. But--don't you see--that you have compromised me--?"

His eyes flashed to hers.

"What--?"

"Don't you see?"

"Let any man dare to --"

She patted his arm.

"Yes--yes, you are very brave, you are ready to shoot anyone. Oh, yes--I heard all about the pear tree in Farmer Starbright's orchard."

He looked to see whether she was laughing at him, and found that she was not.

He turned to see whether she was laugh-
ing at him, and found that she was not.

"Sophia—I swear——"

"Dear friend, don't swear!"

"This blackguard——"

"Pah—do you think I did not know what
a poor rogue he was! But you are so
masterful, my dear Stephen—that I had to
show you that I could hold my own a little.
But now——"

He turned, and tried to take her hand.

"Sophia——"

"Stephen, you must learn to be gentle."

"Love—when it is wise—is gentle," he
said.

[The End.]

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DYNAMITE

By WARWICK DEEPING



THE southern night was very still, and the sky a canopy of black velvet studded with silver nails.

The waters of the bay were as still as the sky, and far blacker, though the stars were reflected in it, while the lights of the great city of San Pietro made a yellow shine in the far distance like the moon rising above a cloud.

John Brock strolled out on to the veranda of his American-built villa on his island of Miranda, and lit a cigar.

"If only these infernal fools would stop fighting we should have those docks finished in six months, Sax. Lord! I wish they would make me dictator over here."

Otto Sax had followed the great man out on to the veranda, where the windows threw yellow patches of light across the lawn below the steps. For John Brock was a great man in that Southern State, a man who had built a railway, opened up mines, created a fleet of steamers, and turned his island of Miranda in San Pietro Bay into a kind of Paradise. The new docks that he had been blasting out of the rocks of Butterfly Island a mile away were silent and deserted. For one of the many revolutions had arisen, and Brock's workpeople had either fled or been pounced upon by the revolutionaries and pressed to serve in their army or on their ships. They had seized two of Brock's steamers, and sunk another in the mouth of the Sabara river.

"We ought to be here, sir. The big fist of the Teuton, sir, would smash their silly wars."

Sax, Brock's secretary, was a German, with scarred cheeks, a hogged mous-

tache, staring blue eyes, and huge feet. He was a big man, who seemed to swell himself out as though his Pan-German prejudices were preparing to clear the earth for the glory of the Fatherland.

Brock smiled, that dry smile of his, and settled himself in one of the long chairs.

"You are too great on treading on people's corns, Sax, and you tread too heavily. What a gem of a night! I suppose some of those blackguards are out there with their silly gunboats. I don't see that they can do us much more damage, save wasting our time. You answered that letter of Belgrano's?"

"Thunder! I did," said the German.

Brock looked at him sharply.

"Not too much heel, Sax, I hope? That fellow can make himself an infernal nuisance if he pleases."

Sax inflated himself, and puffed at his pipe.

"I am a German, sir. I do not keep my fist in my pocket."

The millionaire turned on his elbow.

"Look here, Sax, I may as well tell you at once—not to do so much of the bull-frog on every possible occasion. As for that pocket of yours, it is my money that goes into it. See?"

Sax nodded his aggressive head.

"As you please, sir. But you should leave me to deal with some of these scoundrels."

Brock lay back in his chair. He had decided that it was time that he got rid of Sax. The German was too bumptious.

There was a ripple of sound, the first bars of a waltz being played upon a very fine piano. The player broke off dis-

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jointedly, struck a few stray notes, and then drifted into the sighing, slumbrous pathos of Raff's "La Fileuse." The German spread himself, and grunted with patronising unction.

"Ach—dat is better! Dat is good. Fräulein Norah will play those frivolous French waltzes."

Brock smiled at the conceit of the man. Sax never knew when he was being impertinent. That was the bother.

But, at least, Sax could listen in silence to good music finely played, and Brock stretched himself at full length and watched his cigar smoke disappearing into the darkness. That subtle slumber song seemed to weave itself into the mystery of the southern night. It lost itself in the perfume of exotic flowers, melted away into the black gloom of the trees, seemed to glimmer back at him as though the stars took up the rhythm.

Now another man heard the faint murmur of this music, a man who was at the end of himself, whose chest felt ready to burst, and whose arms ached till he almost wished they were no longer part of his body. He was swimming close in towards the island where an inlet thrust in between overhanging mango trees. He was paddling with short, feeble strokes, his chin going under the water every few seconds, his eyes straining towards the dark outline of the mango trees.

Ten yards farther on he felt for the bottom with his feet, did not find it, went under, and came up with a grim splutter.

"Oh, hang it! I'll have to do it."

He paddled on, growing blind with exhaustion, gaining a few inches at each stroke. There was hardly a kick left in his legs, and his arms ached infernally. But he held out, reached the mango roots, and, pulling himself up on to one of them, lay across it like a man in anguish.

"My God!"

For a moment he looked like a pulpy, drowned thing, driven ashore by a big wave and left hanging on that tree root. Then his head came up. He spat, heaved himself shorewards, and, wading and climbing, found himself high and dry.

He was a tall, lean man, dressed in white linen coat and trousers that clung

tight to him, and his string-soled shoes squelched as he walked.

"Well, here goes!"

He blundered through the trees, glimpsed a light, and then found himself on a winding path. An alley of palms led him to a great sloping lawn that went up to the veranda of John Brock's villa.

Sax was sentimentally bemused, staring at the stars, and thinking of the girl at the piano as a possible "braut." It was Brock who caught sight of the white figure gliding out of the gloom of the trees, and he sat up suddenly in his lounge chair.

"Hallo!"

His right hand went into the side pocket of his coat.

"Who's that?"

"All right, sir; all right."

The white figure crossed the grass and reached a strip of light that shone from one of the windows.

"Murdock! What the devil, man——"

Brock's Scots engineer climbed the veranda steps, and caught hold of one of the white pillars. His face was as white as his coat.

"All right, sir. Give me a stiff glass; will you? I'm done."

"Sit down here, man. That's it. Pass that whisky over, Sax."

Murdock flopped into a chair and put his head down between his knees.

"I shall be all right in a jiffy, sir."

"Drink this."

Murdock gulped the stuff down, and Brock and the German stood and watched him. Norah Brock was still at the piano, playing one of Chopin's waltzes.

"That's better."

Murdock drew a deep breath. A kind of laconic energy seemed to flash up in him.

"Is your motor-boat down at the stage, sir?"

"Yes."

"Send the boys down to get her out, and take her round to the other side of the island. I'll explain in three minutes. But let's get going first."

Brock turned, and rang an electric bell.

"Nelson; tell Perkins and Hunt to go down and get the launch out, and take her round to the Crooked Creek landing. Bustle along."

Dynamite

Sax made a movement.

"I am very good at making men do things quickly, sir."

Brock snubbed him.

"Stay where you are, Sax. They'd take twice as long with you bullying them."

He turned to the Scotsman.

"Well, what's up, Murdock? You're wet through, man."

"I had to swim for it, sir."

"What! You've swum from Butterfly Island?"

"Half-way, sir, and if there had been ten more feet I'd have gone under. Belgrano and a dozen boatloads of scallywags landed there this evening. They smashed up my boat, but I managed to give them the slip and get away after dark in an old canoe with a bit of board for a paddle. The thing was rotten, and let me through when I was half-way over."

Brock's face had grown very serious.

"Belgrano! What is the blackguard after?"

"He was after me, sir, but I managed to fool him. A nice offer he made me. He'll be here, sir, any moment. I reckon we had better be shifting, sir. Go and tell Miss Norah to put on a cloak."

"I'm not going to run away from Belgrano, man. What is he after?"

"The dynamite, sir, just that."

Brock's whole body seemed to stiffen. Then he faced round on Sax, who was leaning against one of the pillars.

"Sax, what did you say in that letter?"

The German inflated his chest.

"I told him to go to the devil, sir."

Brock swore, not wantonly, but with fierce emphasis.

"You darned fool! I told you to be civil to the fellow—firm but civil—and to put him off."

"I put him off, sir. I dared him to land here—to come after the stuff. I joked him, sir, told him he could not find it if he came."

Murdock gave a dry, laconic laugh.

"Sax has cooked it for us. There are only two people on this island who know where the stuff is hidden, and we who know had better clear out. The *Minnehaha* is anchored off the town. If we can make her we can laugh at Belgrano."

And then a girl sailed down on them along the veranda, a girl whose hair shone as she passed each window, and whose white dress made her look slim and tall.

"Had not Mr. Murdock better change those wet clothes?"

"Why, Norah, practical as usual? And you've been listening."

"Why not. So General Belgrano is coming after that dynamite, is he? If you don't mind, dad, I have an idea that I would like to be out of this island when that gentleman arrives."

Sax stood beaming on her, and swaying his body forward at the hips, but she looked past him at the Scotsman, and Murdock looked at her. His chin had gone up, and his mouth was a hard line. It was as though he and Miss Norah Brock had quarrelled desperately not very long ago, and were fiercely armed against each other's pride.

"Mr. Brock, sir, I don't want to hurry you. If I may go in and get a pistol and some dry cartridges——"

"Take a suit of my ducks, man. And here, Norah, run in and put on a cloak or something. Don't make a fuss; tell the servants we are going to stroll down to the fish ponds."

Murdock had bolted into the house, and Norah followed him. Sax had pulled a big service revolver out of his pocket, and was examining it ostentatiously.

"Let's have a look at your pistol, Sax."

The German handed it over, and John Brock promptly put it in his pocket.

"You are better without that, Sax. I'll look after it for you. Hallo! What's that?"

He turned sharply, and stared into the encircling darkness. The tops of palms and cypresses rose dimly against the starlit sky, but the blackness below was massive and impenetrable. Sax had stepped back against a strip of wall between two windows, and was tugging at the tusks of his moustache.

Norah Brock came gliding out wrapped in a dark cloak. Her father held up a hand.

"Ssst!"

She moved close to him, her profile lit up by a light from a window.

"What is it?"

John Brock had heard a short, startled

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cry that had risen out of the heavy silence of that southern night and fallen back again into the silence like a stone into a pool. A watch-dog barked, and John Brock had his hand on the revolver in his pocket.

"Where's Murdock?"

"Coming."

Both of them felt the surrounding darkness of the gardens to be uncanny, strange, threatening. They seemed to sense something abnormal, to be conscious of other presences near them and drawing nearer. Sax, obtuse and sentimental, was watching father and daughter, and caressing Norah Brock's soft hair with his thoughts.

"I'll swear that there is something down there that has no right to be there."

The bushes rustled, and they caught the shivering sound made by bamboos when a wind stirs them, but there was no wind that night.

Then Murdock came out on to the veranda, and as he passed the windows his face looked lean and white and sullen.

"Ready, sir. What about——"

He stopped abruptly and stood staring. For something white drew out of the darkness, and a mass of shadowy movement seemed to follow it. The white thing shaped itself into a figure of a man dressed in a white drill suit, with a *képi* set jauntily on his head, and a red sash round his waist.

"Good evening to you, Meester Brock. I find you at home, sir. That is good."

Brock gave an expressive grunt. Murdock stood rigid, chin up, eyes steady. Sax seemed to wake from a dream; he tapped his chest and looked about him aggressively; if there was any quarrelling to be done, it was he who would do it. Norah Brock curled an arm round one of the white pillars and watched her father.

"Hallo! Who is it?"

Brock knew who the man in white was, but someone had to begin the fencing. And all the while he had a vision of hundreds of neat packages hidden away in an underground vault on the other side of the island.

The man came forward into the light, and the moving shadows behind him betrayed themselves as "children of liberty" in *képis* and slouch hats, garnished with bandoliers, and armed

with rifles, the butts of which went down with a thud.

"What! General Belgrano? Come in, sir."

Brock was all politeness, suavity, self-confidence. Belgrano carried a light cane; he twirled it, and saluted.

"A thousand apologies, Meester Brock." He spoke English very well, with a slight American accent. "I come on business, sir, at this atrocious hour. Ah, Murdock, my friend, there you are! Sly dog! Mees Brock, your servant."

He smiled, and showed his white teeth, as though the whole affair charmed him. For Belgrano was one of those handsome, suave, astute blackguards who carried a casual politeness about with him, and would have a man burnt alive while he was eating his dinner.

"Come in, General. Your men can pile their arms on the lawn. What would they like—some maté or pinga?"

"Oh, nothing, sir, nothing. It will please them to lounge in the veranda and listen, and keep an eye on us all through the windows. More of my children are over there, Meester Brock. Yes, I will come in, sir."

He walked up the steps, turned, and twirled his cane as a signal to his men. Brock waited for him politely. Murdock did not move, but stood there as stiffly as one of the pillars.

"Mees Brock, I heard your pretty music over the water. I will give a dance on one of my ships, or in the President's palace when it is mine; and you shall hear our music. Now, sir."

Then Otto Sax blundered forward like a rhino, the man of blood and iron—and bluff.

"I am a German, sir, and I will trouble you——"

Murdock's left arm swung up suddenly like the arm of a semaphore. His hand caught Sax under the chin, and jarred him into astonished silence.

"Shut up, you fool!"

Brock interposed.

"All right, Murdock, all right. Mr. Sax; I will trouble you to keep in the background. The General is my guest."

He gave his arm to his daughter, and led the way from the veranda into the drawing-room, a room that had been the talk of the city of San Pietro, for John Brock knew how to impress the South



"'Hallo! Who is it?' Brock knew who he was, but someone had to begin the fencing"

American mind. It was a gorgeous room, an arrogantly successful room like a very vain and a very rich woman showing off all her jewels. Norah hated it, and had christened it "the swank saloon," which indeed it was.

Murdock attended the General, and Belgrano gave him a sinister, laughing look as he entered.

"Very clever, very clever, Meester Murdoke. I'll give you another chance—in five minutes."

Murdock said nothing, but hung back, and turned on Sax, who was following. And all the concentrated wrath that was in him spent itself on the German in one quick flare of scorn.

"Look here, Sax, if you speak another word to-night I'll shoot you, see. I mean it, man. You're a darned, interfering, boasting fool, but for God's sake keep quiet about it. We have got enough ballast to carry without having a fifty-ton jackass like you thrown in."

The German stared, and said nothing.

As Murdock entered the room he heard the pattering of many feet as Belgrano's men crowded into the veranda. John Brock had taken out his cigar case, and was offering it to Belgrano. Norah Brock had thrown off her cloak, and had seated herself in a Louis Quinze chair under a palm that was modelled in solid silver.

Belgrano bit off the end of the cigar,

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sat down, crossed his legs, and threw his cane and his *képi* on to a Japanese table. He gave one glance at the line of windows and smiled. Faces were flattened against them, the watchful and inquisitive faces of his men.

"Well—Meester Brock—sir—I think we can do business together. Mr. Murdock is a very quick fellow, but I have got a corner on him this time. Now, Meester Brock, you must sympathise with a man in my position. You have got what we want, and we have got to have the stuff, sir; we must have it. You won't disoblige me; I'm sure of that."

Brock pretended not to understand.

"You are a bit vague, General. What do you want—stores—cash?"

"It would have been more pleasant for all of us, Meester Brock, if you had left that dynamite at Butterfly Island, and not brought it over and hidden it here."

Brock countered him.

"Dynamite! What dynamite?"

"Dear sir, what a short memory you have! I happen to know that the stuff is on this island, and I happen to know that you shipped the men who handled it off to Europe in the last boat. They were good men, sir, honest servants. Now, Meester Brock, you will oblige me——"

Brock's face was stolid, obstinate.

"What do you want dynamite for, General?"

Murdock's voice struck in with laconic irony.

"I can answer that question for General Belgrano. The great Copaiba dam is a little thing that needs removing, so that San Pietro should lose its water supply, and be helped into a surrender. Then that tunnel through the Ombrosa range is a bit of a nuisance; General Florio and his Federals would be blocked out, with their guns, for three weeks or more if that tunnel were wrecked. And I suppose the General is short of dynamite!"

Belgrano bowed to him.

"Mr. Murdock, you are a very clever man. Most certainly I have a few little adventures of this kind in preparation. Mr. Brock will understand why I must insist on doing business. I am sure that we shall not quarrel."

Brock laughed.

"It can't be done, sir. I'm not selling or even giving."

Belgrano waved his hands protestingly.

"Now, how difficult you will make it for me, the good-natured Belgrano!"

He knocked the ash from his cigar, and suddenly his whole expression changed. He looked fiercely at Brock; his face seemed to lose its smooth and indolent softness; it was a hard, firm, white face with eyes that were quick and cruel.

"Mr. Brock, sir, I must have that stuff to-night—at once. There is no alternative. You take me?"

Brock nodded his big head.

"There are only two people in this island, General, who know where that dynamite is stored, and I don't think either of us will let you into the secret."

Belgrano rose from his chair and bowed. He had begun to sneer.

"Your prejudices puzzle me, Meester Brock."

"I have prejudices, General, against providing the stuff that will blow hundreds of men and women and children into eternity. For that, sir, is what it means."

Belgrano's eyes were turned towards Norah Brock. She had been listening, watching the faces of the three men, and her mouth was scornful.

"Then I shall have to give you your choice, Mr. Brock. Either you surrender that dynamite, or I take your daughter on board my ship."

They stared at him, and the suggestive, leering evil in the man's eyes was prophetic and unmistakable. He waved a hand towards the windows where the crowding and mute faces of his men looked white and sinister. They looked like animals waiting to be fed.

Otto Sax was rocking on his heels, and his eyes seemed to protrude, but he kept quiet in his corner. John Brock's face was twitching. Norah was watching Murdock, who stood stiffly like a soldier at attention.

"Belgrano, you are a darned scoundrel!"

Brock's voice was like the roar of a gun, but Belgrano only smiled at him.

"No, sir; I do business, and you are very obstinate. Well, what do you say, Meester Brock?"

Dynamite

Murdock's eyes flashed. There was chivalry in the man; he was ready to take the burden off John Brock's shoulders, but his face looked grey.

"Obviously, General Belgrano must have the dynamite."

Belgrano snapped his fingers at the Scotsman.

"That is sense, sir—common sense."

But Brock still struggled.

"No, no. He has got to find it—if we refuse—"

Murdock spoke sharply.

"We can't refuse. I will show him where the stuff is hidden."

The revolutionary's face beamed his exultation.

"Wait one moment, General. It is to be a bargain. Mr. Brock and his daughter are to be put on board their launch, with their own men, and be given half an hour to reach the *Minnehaha* that is lying in the bay. I stay here—in your hands, General, and I pledge myself to show you where the dynamite is hidden. You can shoot me if I fail."

Belgrano went close to Murdock and looked him in the eyes.

"That is a bargain, Meester Murdock. You are a man of sense. Put your arms up, sir; it is wise to take precautions."

Murdock put his hands above his head, and Belgrano picked a revolver out of the Scotsman's pocket.

"You may not have meant to use it, Meester Murdock, and I will return it to you when we leave the island. And now, Meester Brock, I will send one of my officers to see that your launch is ready. We had to tie up two of your men whom we caught on the landing-stage."

He turned to one of the windows, but someone else was to have a say in the matter of the hidden dynamite.

"One moment, General Belgrano."

Norah Brock had risen and had crossed the room.

"Mr. Murdock, have I asked you to interfere on my account?"

They faced each other while Belgrano and her father stood aside and looked on. Murdock's face was grey and sullen, but a half-fanatical fire shone in his eyes.

"I have not waited to be asked, Miss Brock."

They looked at each other as though there were some bitter quarrel between them, and as though they were ready to wound each other because each was the owner of an implacable pride.

"You will withdraw your promise to General Belgrano."

"That is impossible."

"But suppose I choose to go as his prisoner?"

Murdock looked at her steadily.

"Whatever you choose to do I shall hand over the dynamite to General Belgrano."

She threw a taunt at him.

"What a brave man!"

His pale and determined face flushed slightly.

"We will not argue that point. Mr. Brock, may I ask you to take charge of your daughter. I have made up my mind, and I shall not change it."

Norah Brock turned away.

"Very well. Mr. Murdock has taken this pretty bargain out of our hands. Let us leave him to it."

Belgrano seemed amused. He had accepted this offer of Murdock's very readily, for the simple reason that smoke had been seen pouring from the U.S.A. battleship's funnels that afternoon, and that she was reported to have left at sundown for the north. Brock and his daughter could go off in their launch, but they would not find the *Minnehaha* lying in San Pietro bay.

He looked at Brock.

"You will accept these terms, sir?"

Brock nodded and frowned at his daughter.

"Yes."

"That is excellent. Mr. Murdock will come with us to see you safely afloat."

Audacious and irrepressible he offered his arm to Miss Brock. Murdock's face twitched, his eyes were furious. And Norah Brock was looking at him over her shoulder, her chin raised, a kind of merciless defiance in that look of hers.

She took Belgrano's arm. Murdock watched her sweep out of the room; his face seemed to grow haggard, but his lean jaw and indomitable mouth betrayed no weakening.

Brock was loitering, as though trying to get a word with the Scotsman, but Belgrano paused and looked back over his shoulder.

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"I do not wish to hurry you, Meester Brock."

Brock swore softly, and beckoned impatiently to Sax.

"Come along—Herr Donner und Blitzen. I have to thank you for this."

Murdock followed them through the crowd of Belgrano's revolutionaries—swarthy gentlemen with blood of varying shades. Someone was carrying a lantern on a pole. One end of the veranda was black with Brock's negro servants, Barbadians and Jamacians, the whites of their eyes and their teeth shining in the semi-darkness. Yet Murdock walked like a man going to his death. All his consciousness was the self that had decided to sacrifice itself, and yet wondered at its own fanaticism. In an hour he would have ceased to be, and for what? To save human lives, or to prove himself stronger than a woman?

He noticed nothing but Norah Brock's white dress, a mothlike, tantalising, elusive shred of femininity. A great bitterness surged through him. He would prove to her that he could be the master of his own fate.

They reached the landing-stage where black water blinked at the stars.

Belgrano was the courtier, the devotee. Murdock saw him help Norah Brock into the launch. Brock had turned, and he was looking back.

"Murdock!"

"Here, sir; I'm all right."

"Shake, man!"

Murdock went forward and grasped John Brock's hand.

"It will be all right, sir. I can settle—that business—I think."

He turned sharply, and drew back into the shadows of the trees. Brock looked at him wistfully, undecided.

"Let them have the stuff, Murdock. And I don't want to lose you, man."

"Don't worry your head about me, sir."

Sax followed Brock into the launch; the chain was cast off, the engine began to purr, and the propeller set the black water swirling.

Norah Brock glanced back. She was wondering now why she had been so merciless to James Murdock.

A quarter of an hour passed. They were circling the island that lay like a big black rock, the lights in the villa

hidden by the trees. Neither John Brock nor his daughter had spoken. Otto Sax seemed depressed.

Then Brock said suddenly:

"Norah, I'm going back. They can cut in and set me ashore, and then take you on."

She stared at him.

"Going back?"

"Yes; I ought to be sharing it with Murdock. I know what he is going to do. I didn't realise it till I had one foot in the boat."

"What is it, dad?"

"Murdock won't get out of that alive. The dynamite is mined. He means to fool Belgrano."

She sat mute, clutching his hand.

"Murdock will blow it up. And then—they'll kill him!"

"Of course. And I'm going back. Here, Hunt, swing her round, man, and make for Palm Point."

Norah Brock looked into her father's face.

"Dad, don't go!"

He pushed her hand away almost fiercely.

"What! Murdock's a hero, and am I going to slink off and let him take all the damage alone? Thank God, we're men—both of us! You might have been kinder to Murdock. Swing her round."

Then the man in the bow gave a sharp and astonished cry. They had cleared the last headland, and not two hundred fathoms away shone the lights of a great ship. She was motionless, as though anchored, though a faint drift of smoke rose from her funnels.

"Blimy, it's the *Minnehaha*!"

Perkins, the fellow in the bow, was an old man-o'-war's man.

"We'll be aboard her, sir, in three minutes."

Brock stood up and looked at the black, looming bulk of the battleship as though he still hesitated. His daughter made up his mind for him, and with it—her own.

"They might be in time to save James Murdock."

The launch raced for the *Minnehaha*.

Now on the island Belgrano and James Murdock were strolling side by side down a narrow glade that had been cut through the tropical vegetation. A man followed some paces behind, carrying a

Dynamite

lantern, and he in turn was followed by about fifty of Belgrano's rebels. And Belgrano and the engineer appeared to have struck up a sudden friendship. Murdock was laughing, the cynical laughter suited to Belgrano's ears.

"Well, what will you give me, General, if I settle the Copaiba dam for you and smash that tunnel."

Belgrano had been tempting his man, and had found him strangely venal.

"You are a very clever engineer, Meester Murdoke; you would be very useful to us, but the dollars are not so plentiful at present——"

"But if you win, you could afford the dollars. Hallo, may I have that lantern? We are near the indicator."

"What's that?"

Murdock took the lantern and explained as he searched about.

"The stuff's buried in a stone vault and covered with three feet of soil. We set a marker about two hundred yards away, and I shall have to measure off the distance. I'll sight it in a minute."

He moved about holding the lantern close to the ground till he found a piece of rough natural rock let into the soil. It was about a foot in diameter, and the grass had grown up over its edges. Murdock got his fingers under the edge, turned it over, and reached down into the hole.

"All right. No one's been here. What about ten thousand dollars, General?"

Then there was a roar as though a volcano had erupted. The whole island shuddered. Belgrano threw his arms up and covered his face. He staggered, recovered himself, and yelled to his men.

"Shoot—shoot the devil!"

But Murdock had hurled the lantern away and gone crawling on his hands and knees towards the tangle of trees and shrubs that walled in the glade, and Belgrano's men were in confusion; some had thrown themselves flat on the ground, others were running for their lives. Murdock reached cover, bored his way in, and curled himself close to the trunk of a huge tree.

Then came the deluge. Earth, stones, the torn branches of trees fell like tropical rain. There was a crashing of boughs and of underwood, a thudding of stones, the yells of terror-stricken men. Murdock flattened himself against

the stem of the great tree, held his breath and exulted.

A lean lieutenant standing in the stern sheets of one of the *Minnehaha's* boats shouted an order to his men.

"Hold up—hold her up! Gee-whiz, someone's going to Paradise!"

Norah Brock, sitting at her father's side, stared at the murky, dust-smothered island. She could see the water spurting white as though whipped by rifle bullets and ploughed by shells. The sailors were backing water. A stone struck one of the thwarts and bounded into the sea.

The lieutenant stood through it all, grinning. In a few seconds a vast and awed calm seemed to fall about them. The stars twinkled placidly.

"Beat her up, boys. The old ship's got her night eyes working."

The *Minnehaha* had turned her searchlights on the three boats. The glare lit the island as the sailors set their oars whipping and raced for the shore.

It was just a matter of luck for James Murdock that a falling stone cracked Belgrano's skull, and left no one capable of rallying his "children of liberty." They scampered for their boats on the other side of the island, helped towards even livelier exertions by the glare of the *Minnehaha's* searchlights.

The *Minnehaha's* mariners found no gentlemen to fight with them.

Brock, his daughter, the senior lieutenant, and half a dozen men made for the place where the dynamite had been hidden. Two of the sailors carried lanterns, and the lieutenant had a bugler at his elbow.

"Blow, Callagan; see if you can fetch up the dead."

And Callagan fetched up a very live man in the person of James Murdock.

There were congratulations, handshakes, mutual laudations. Brock took charge of the lieutenant on the way back to the villa.

And somehow James Murdock and Brock's daughter did not hurry.

"I'm sorry I was such a beast to you, Jim. I didn't know then—how fine you could be."

"I wasn't fine," he argued. "I was only in a devil of a temper, and I was out to score."

"You have scored," she said simply, "what more can a woman say?"



Cassell's Dec 1915
NO MONEY IN IT

By **WARWICK DEEPING**



CAPTAIN O'CONNOR had made himself very pleasant in the parlour of the "George." When one ignored the prominent black patch over his left eye, the very frayed edge of his cravat, and the dusty look of the seams of his red coat, he was rather a stately gentleman, though a trifle rosy about the nose. His right eye was very shrewd and enigmatic, and suggested that its owner had a peculiar gift of seeing round corners, and what lay at the backs of other people's heads.

Farmer Scollop and Attorney Burrell's clerk had been persuaded into loquacity by Captain O'Connor's eloquent praise of Willingham and its salubrious neighbourhood.

"As pretty a place as ever I did see, sirs, and I've been a man of travels. Everything spick and span, and good red bricks in your houses, and mighty fine trees too, gentlemen. You must be men of substance here."

Farmer Scollop heaved complacently in his chair, and reckoned that they were.

"It does me good to see it, gentlemen, though an old soldier does not come by the guineas. Title-deeds don't go with a commission. But I have had my share of glory, gentlemen, serving the King."

"That you have, sir, I be sure," said the attorney's clerk generously.

"Have another glass of sherry, sir. You men of substance can stand good liquor. Deuce take it, but I should like to own a regiment of these fine red houses. Broad-chested fellows—gentlemen, ha—ha! Now, I fell in an ecstasy over that house by the church, the house with the big white cornice."

"That be Sir Dyke Harbottle's," said the farmer.

"A good name, sir, and a fine mansion. And next to it, gentlemen, that big house with the iron railings—behind the square—set me breaking the tenth commandment, the house with the green door, and the balustrade along the top."

"That be Mr. Winterton's, Roger

Winterton's," said the farmer with less warmth.

"And you have got a factory, too. New thing for Willingham, gentlemen?"

"That be Roger Winterton's," said the farmer, still more grudgingly; "I don't hold with factories."

The Captain brought out a little case of cigars.

"Honour me, gentlemen. No, I don't hold with factories. And who is Mr. Roger Winterton?"

It was the clerk's turn to oblige Captain O'Connor with information, and he did it with some spleen.

"The devil alone knows, Captain. He came here five years ago, and started the factory down by the stream. He brought money with him, and he's made money. There are some as hold with him—and some as don't."

"Upstart, is he?" said the Captain, "all broadcloth—and Bible!"

The farmer chuckled.

"All broadcloth, sir, but Parson Fothergill don't love him. Sort of Methody chap."

"I say he's an atheist, an accursed Jacobin," said the clerk.

"Well, they be as bad as each other," quoth the farmer, "but this 'ere chap has split Willingham into two chunks."

Captain O'Connor's single eye was now glittering.

"He's loved, and he's hated, is that it?" he asked.

"Right on the nail, sir. Roger Winterton don't talk pious, but he does pious. They did think as that there factory of his would be a scandal, but bless me, there was half a riot when some of the blue boys tried to burn Winterton in effigy on Guy Fawke's day. Why, he treats his work people like—like—"

The farmer's imagination failed him.

"Like fat cattle," suggested the clerk.

"That's it, Mr. Grigson, that's it. And he don't drink, sir, won't drink. That put all the squires against him. And cards, bless me—won't touch 'em."

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And what riles 'em is that he ain't your liverless, skim milk sort of creature. Fine straight-up, square-eyed sort of fellow. Can fight, too. Thrashed young Squire Benyon for cutting at him with his cane."

The clerk had been simmering while the farmer talked. And now he exploded with the piece of news that had set Willingham bubbling like a kettle.

"And he's going to marry Miss Falconer!"

The farmer echoed the words, as though he were singing a glee.

"He be going to marry Miss Falconer!"

Captain O'Connor pretended to be impressed by the enormity of the news, simply because he was a stranger who had a particular purpose in discovering all that was to be discovered about Mr. Roger Winterton.

"And who may Miss Falconer be?"

"Miss Falconer! Why, she be—Miss—Falconer."

The farmer's explanation was not very luminous.

"And why shouldn't this Roger Winterton marry Miss Falconer? If he's a man of honour and spirit he's good enough for any woman."

"I never said as he shouldn't marry her. It be the talk of the county, that's all."

"What has the lady to be up on her heels about?"

"She be Miss Falconer, with all the Woodbridge estate behind her. The Falconers have been the Falconers for three hundred years. D'ye see?"

Captain O'Connor saw things with sudden and significant clearness. He was immensely elated within himself.

"Old maid, I suppose?"

The clerk broke in protestingly.

"Old maid be hanged, sir! Miss Falconer is five-and-twenty, and as fine and comely a lady as there is in the kingdom. The whole county's been in love with her."

"Oh, you dog!" said the Captain, prodding him playfully with his cane.

The clerk felt flattered.

"Well, sir, I've as sharp an eye for a handsome woman as any man living."

About six o'clock that evening Captain O'Connor, having brushed his red coat and had his boots blacked by the

stable boy, strolled out along King Street, and down Bull Lane into St. Catharine's Square. It was a square of solid, broad-fronted Queen Anne houses with white cornices and window frames, and in the centre of the square was a little formal garden with a fountain, lawns, and clipped yews. The roadway was of cobbles, the walks paved with great flagstones, and Captain O'Connor tapped the flagstones with his cane as he strutted along, quite a distinguished figure when not looked at too closely. He walked through the fine iron gateway leading to Roger Winterton's house, and lifting the brass knocker, rapped lustily.

A man-servant in a plain plum-coloured livery opened the door.

"Mr. Winterton's, I believe."

"Yes, sir."

"Is he at home?"

"No, sir. Mr. Winterton is at the factory. He won't be home till seven."

"I will come in and wait for your master, John."

But the man-servant thought otherwise. He had seen something of life, and had a quick sense of smell.

"Mr. Winterton may be late, sir. Perhaps you will leave your name."

"I will call again, my man, later."

He stalked off, flourishing his cane, and the servant closed the door on him.

But on the sunny side of St. Catharine's Square the one-eyed adventurer met the very man he had come to see, striding along deep in thought, a smile playing about his mouth. He was a tallish, square-shouldered man with grey eyes, and a quiet, decisive mouth.

"Why, Roger, my buck!"

Roger Winterton stopped dead and raised his eyes sharply.

"Don't say you don't remember me, Roger!"

Winterton answered him calmly.

"Captain O'Connor, I remember you very well."

"Why, that's the tune! How are you, Roger? I'm glad to see you."

Roger Winterton's grim face betrayed neither disgust nor elation.

"Thank you, sir; I hope you are well."

He prepared to pass on, but Captain O'Connor stood in his way.

"Just called at your house, Roger. Bless me, you haven't wasted your time, my boy. A fine house—plenty of money

No Money in It

—and going to marry an heiress. Ha! you dog! I have all the news, you see. Well, I wish you good luck, Roger. What times those were, eh?"

Roger Winterton kept his eyes fixed on the other's face.

"I have forgotten all about those times, Captain O'Connor, and I have no desire to remember them."

"Bless me! Why, my boy——"

"I will wish you good evening."

"None of your old blackguard game with me, O'Connor. I am not a man to be played with. Willingham will not be a safe place for you."

He thrust the Captain aside, but O'Connor followed him as he walked towards his house.

"I tell you, you are a base rogue, Roger Winterton. Your old friends are dogs in the gutter, are they? You had better listen to me, sir."



"'Into the river with the old dog'"

He stepped into the road, and was about to walk straight past the adventurer, but Captain O'Connor caught him by the lapel of his coat.

"Damme, Roger Winterton——"

His one eye flamed, the eye of a bully, and his red face lost all its false good humour and became sinister, threatening.

"Damme, Roger Winterton, not so fast, my buck."

Winterton's right hand came up, seized the soldier's wrist, and gave it so grim a twist that O'Connor let go his hold.

"Is it money you want?"

"Sir!"

Winterton turned on him and spoke with quiet passion.

"O'Connor, let us understand each other. Those days when I lived with rips and gamblers and men of fashion are dead. I do not choose to remember them; I have paid the price of a young man's folly; I have chosen a man's life instead of a fool's. You, sir, think that money is to be made out of me, because you believe that you can frighten me with

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"this same past. I tell you that you are wrong."

O'Connor's face was not pleasant to behold.

"Don't try to bluff me, Roger Winterton. There are people here who don't love you, would be glad to get hold of a little gossip. And what about the heiress, eh—the proud Miss Falconer?"

"A nice tale for her pretty ears! I could amuse her with some of your adventures, Roger! Do you remember red-haired Sally and old Mother Keep's little paradise, and the gambling hells and the drunken games we played? And then there was Mrs. Bloxbourn."

Winterton eyed him grimly.

"Yes, and the foul rogues who were ready to take a youngster's money and help him down to hell. Out of my way, O'Connor, or I may hurt you, man."

The Captain drew himself up suddenly.

"Strike me, sir, for the love of Heaven, strike me. I have my sword and my honour left."

"Out of my way, man; do you think I would fight such a thing as you?"

He walked on and passed through the iron gateway leading to the door of his house. He had his foot on the step when O'Connor shouted at him with insolent familiarity.

"Very well, Roger, my boy, I will go and pay my respects to Miss Falconer. To-morrow will be soon enough. If you want to see me, Roger, before to-morrow, you will find me at the 'George.'"

Roger Winterton ignored him. He entered his house and closed the door.

But though he had shown no fear of this old swashbuckler's tongue, Roger Winterton was greatly troubled. He walked through the house into the garden.

Winterton drew something from the breast pocket of his coat. It was the miniature of a woman, a woman whose dark eyes looked out with a half-laughing haughtiness from under a broad, low forehead.

Winterton held the miniature in his hand, and looked at it tenderly.

"So the test has come at last, Joan. And yet, dear, I trust you. I trusted you with the truth long ago. It was only fair, only honest."

He walked to and fro, stopping now and again to gaze at the miniature.

"Can your pride bear it? It was our secret, a secret that made you dearer to me. But now, the good people who do not love me will think that they have the right to pity you. They will expect you to turn from me with scorn."

A servant found him strolling to and fro over the bowling green; his hands behind his back.

"Will you sup at home to-night, sir?"

"No, John; I sup at Ferners Abbey."

Joan Falconer was on the terrace at Ferners watching the sunset when Roger Winterton came through the yew walk that led from the gate in the wall. She did not see him for a moment, and he stood below, looking up at her with a smile of questioning tenderness.

"No storms in the sky to-night?"

She leant over the parapet, and the glow of the sunset was upon her. Winterton thought that he had never seen her look so desirable.

"No clouds in the sky, Roger, even though you are late."

"Yet this is a land of clouds, like life."

She laughed down at him.

"I like some cloud in the sky, Roger. I would not give anything for an eternal glare of sunlight."

He climbed the terrace steps and kissed her hand, and, being a woman, she felt that something troubled him.

"What is it, Roger?"

He straightened himself and looked steadily into her eyes.

"Joan, an old friend of mine is coming to see you to-morrow."

"Why should that trouble you?"

"Does it trouble me? Perhaps not. I could have prevented it, had I pleased, but I would not buy a blackguard's tongue. Remember, dear, that I told you all the truth about myself. This gentleman will amplify it, to coin spite, since it has not brought him money."

She held her head a little more proudly.

"He need not come to me, Roger."

"Dear, it is better that he should come. He shall ring me like a coin on the counter. All Willingham will be by the ears, because I have refused to buy back the years of folly. See this man, Joan. I ask you to see him."

"Why?"

"Because I desire it—because I desire it."

"I will see him, Roger," she said.

No Money in It

Captain O'Connor was up betimes, brushing his red coat and tying a new cravat that he had bought overnight, for it behoved him to look the gentleman when he had such an affair in hand.

"Any letters for me, John?"

"No, sir."

"Humph!"

He sat down to breakfast in the "George" parlour, and swore that the beer was flat and his rumpsteak burnt to a cinder.

The waiter went to fetch more beer and came back with a fresh tankard and a letter.

"Just come for you, Captain."

O'Connor waited till the man had left the room, and then slit the letter open eagerly with his knife. He expected to find crisp notes inside of it, but the sealed wrapper held nothing but a letter.

Captain O'Connor swore and read the letter.

"Miss Falconer will see you this morning. You may tell her what you please."

O'Connor slapped the letter on the table.

"Deuce take you, Roger Winterton, I will make it hot for you in Willingham."

Joan Falconer also had a letter that morning, and she read it as she drank her tea.

"DEAR HEART,—Captain O'Connor will call on you this morning. Hear all that he has to say. If you can bear to forget it, come to me at the factory half an hour before noon. If you do not come I shall understand. Yet shall I remain ever your devoted servant."

Joan Falconer touched the letter with her lips and smiled.

Roger Winterton went early to the red brick building down by the river, where the great water wheels groaned and splashed all through the day. The work-people were streaming into the courtyard. Winterton did not speak to them that morning. His face was set and calm, the face of a man who had set himself to pass through an ordeal.

He went straight to the chief foreman's office.

"Good morning, Mr. Bailey. Will you

have all the people assembled in the courtyard at half-past eleven?"

Bailey glanced up in surprise from the ledger that was under his nose.

"Yes, sir; at half-past eleven?"

"At half-past eleven. I want to speak to them."

Joan Falconer was sitting at her harpsichord in the red parlour when a servant came to announce Captain O'Connor.

"A gentleman wishes to see you, Miss Joan."

"Let him come here, Susan."

She was playing the tune of an old song when Captain O'Connor swaggered into the room, and she half-turned in her chair and looked at him with a kind of haughty amusement.

The Captain made her a solemn bow, pressing his cocked hat over his heart.

"Your servant, Miss Falconer. My name is O'Connor, Captain O'Connor, late of the 10th Foot."

Joan Falconer rose and pointed him to a chair.

"Be seated."

O'Connor glanced at her sharply with his one eye and wondered what sort of a woman he had to deal with.

"Mr. Roger Winterton told me to expect you. I am very glad to see you, Captain O'Connor."

The adventurer sat down rather stiffly. He was a little overawed despite himself, by the enigmatic smile in the eyes of this handsome woman.

"I am afraid, madam, that I have no very pleasant task before me."

She laughed, and her laughter was disconcerting, having such a depth of irony and scorn.

"I want to hear all about those gay times, Captain O'Connor, all the brawling and drinking and the gambling and—and the rest."

"Madam—"

"Mother Keep's must have been a rollicking place. And then there was red-haired Sally, and the night when Mr. Winterton won all that money—"

O'Connor's eye stared.

"Madam, I deplore—"

Then her ironical scorn flashed about him like lightning.

"What, Captain O'Connor, you deplore your own adventures? Come, come, are we to wish all our young men nincompoops and fools? Are we to ex-

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pect them to be saints in the beginning? Let me tell you that I have a great respect for Mr. Winterton because he has tasted such things——"

"Respect, madam?"

"Listen. And found them so foul and contemptible and paltry. He was a fool in order to be wise. You are a fool still, thinking to suck away the wisdom of a man who is a man."

She started up and stood over him.

"And you, you miserable old wretch, you think to drag down the good name of a man who has laboured and striven and put the folly of those days under his feet. You came to uncover your own sores and to cry 'Money! Money.' I am glad that Mr. Roger Winterton scorned you as he did. I am glad that he sent you to me. He feared neither your villainy nor my faith in him. I thank you, Captain O'Connor. You have rendered me a great service."

O'Connor got on his feet and stood bowing to her and trying to hide his astonishment and disgust.

"You have a strange taste, madam. I wish you good morning, madam. Other people may not be so easily pleased."

She swept a hand towards the door.

"Go! If needs be, I myself will take a whip to you and thrash you out of Willingham town."

Half an hour later Joan Falconer walked out into Minister Lane, dressed in a pink and white flowered gown and a straw hat trimmed with ribbons. People turned to look at her as she passed; hats were off, curtsies given, for she looked the great lady for all her simple gown and her country hat. And she smiled at the people who saluted her, smiled with the eyes of a woman who was happy.

Miss Falconer came to the great red brick building by the river. The water wheels were silent for once, and over the courtyard wall came a murmur as of many people gathered together. Suddenly all the murmuring ceased; a man was speaking; it was Roger Winterton's deep voice, and Joan Falconer could hear every word that he said.

She knocked at the closed gate and the porter let her in.

None of the work-people saw her join the crowd in the courtyard, for all eyes were fixed upon the man with the calm and set face who stood on the steps of

the counting-house speaking. He was telling them, simply and courageously, the tale of his life; and the crowd in the courtyard was absorbed, silent. Only towards the end did angry cries break out.

Winterton stretched out an arm.

"So, good friends of mine, if this Captain O'Connor would tell you the truth because I would not pay him to be silent, you can answer him that you know the truth already."

The crowd rose to him with passion.

"Three cheers for Roger Winterton."

"We'll talk to the fellow for ye."

"Leave him to us, sir."

Then a sudden silence fell. People drew back and opened a path for Joan Falconer, who walked through the crowd smiling. Her eyes were towards Roger Winterton. She went to the steps and he came down to meet her, stooping a little and looking into her face.

"Dear, am I forgiven?"

"Do I look anything but happy?"

He raised her hand to his lips and a sudden roar of cheering filled the courtyard. These people saw and understood.

"Long live Miss Falconer!"

"Long lives to ye both, and God bless ye!"

"A lady, as true a lady as ever stepped."

Then some sudden, passionate impulse seized the crowd; the gates were thrown open; men and women poured out.

Winterton and Joan Falconer were left standing alone.

"Dear, I have trusted you. You have not failed me."

"I trusted the man whom I know, Roger, not the wild boy who is dead."

In Queen's Walk, close to the "George," a shouting crowd had fallen upon a one-eyed man in a red coat.

"You be Captian O'Connor."

"You have a tale to tell us, you old pimp!"

O'Connor struggled in the grip of two big workmen.

"Deuce take it! Let go, you fellows. I'll tell you a tale, a pretty tale. Let me get up on those steps; I'll tell you a tale about Mr. Roger Winterton."

"Devil a tale you'll tell! Into the river with the old dog."

And into the river he went, cocked hat, red coat, sword and all.

Story Teller *Guest*
APRIL 1914

Sappho

By Warwick Deeping

"Then something moved in the mirror. I saw a face—a woman's face looking over my shoulder—a face with large dark eyes and black eyebrows. It was a southern face, Greek, and strangely alluring. The dark hair was gathered up and bound with silver and green ribbons."



I HAD been ill, a case of "nerves" from overwork, and Italy and her cities, the orange and olive groves of her Riviera, and the romance of Rome, had put a new soul into my body. I had come on to Naples, and wandered along all that syren's coast, tarrying at Sorrento awhile, and voyaging across to Capri that hangs like a blue cloud beyond the bay. I felt well and strong again, and as normal a man as could be found, till I entered that city of the dead—Pompeii.

I drove there on my first visit, with Vesuvius sending thin drifts of smoke against the northern sky. It was April, and flowers were everywhere, and all the lush beauty of that Southern spring stirred strange emotions in my blood. Those glimpses of Capri across blue stretches of sea, framed between houses, or tall cypresses, or groves of fruit trees, seemed poignantly familiar. It was like a dream redreamed. Even the beans and lupins in the fields seemed part of some half-remembered picture.

I entered Pompeii by the sea gate, one of a party with a guide in charge. And in the dark tunnel of that gateway with the Strada della Marina going up steeply towards the blue of the sky, the tragic shadowiness of the place smote me with a strange uneasiness, a kind of wonder, a dread of something—I knew not what. I remember won-

dering whether I had been chilled by the drive. But that was absurd, for it was April, and a superb day. Yet I felt as a dog may feel when he is taken into the place where he has been cut with the surgeon's knife. A quite ridiculous restlessness took hold of me. I looked at the faces of the French and English who crowded after the guide, and told myself with half-childish emphasis that they were solid and very real.

We turned into the little museum. I have never been a superstitious man, but an inexplicable spasm of anguish gripped me, and I stood staring at those grim grey shapes lying in their glass cases as though—for me—they had some personal, tragic significance. I felt dazed, oppressed by a sense of memory that hurt as a wound hurts when the effects of chloroform are wearing off. I had to challenge my common sense and make myself look at those grim shapes—women and men whom the death agony had racked nearly nineteen hundred years ago.

The air in the streets, the clean breadth of the sky steadied me after the sense of death in that little building.

We went to the Forum, the great theatre, the baths, yet the guide's voice had a far-awayness as he spoke to us, first in French and then in English. He took us into several houses, with their atria, peristyles, tablina, and gardens. Each house seemed much like every other house, save for some piece

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of privately shown sculptured realism, till we came to that house with the leopard worked in mosaic at the entry.

I stopped dead, staring, absurdly convinced that I had seen that beast before.

The guide and the party crowded on, but I did not rejoin them. Wandering across the atrium into the colonnade of the peristyle I heard the guide's voice speaking far away. He was showing the kitchen and the sleeping quarters of the slaves.

Now in the wall of the colonnade, on either side of the doorway, a little round mirror had been let into the wall, and this cracked glass had reflected the faces of Pompeians who had feasted, and laughed, and lived in this House of the Leopard. I turned aside and gazed into one of these mirrors, and saw my own face, a little blurred and distorted, for the glass had suffered from the heat.

Then something moved in the mirror. I saw a face—a woman's face looking over my shoulder—a face with large dark eyes and black eyebrows. It was a southern face, Greek, and strangely alluring. The dark hair was gathered up and bound with silver and green ribbons.

I thought it rather a queer face for ruined Pompeii, and it crossed my mind that this was some enterprising young person who sold trinkets and picture post-cards.

"Non grazie, signorina," I said in my clumsy Italian.

No one answered.

I turned sharply. There was no woman behind me, and the peristyle was empty.

I was pretty seriously astonished, and I stood staring, wondering where the girl had got to.

Then it occurred to me to look again into the mirror. The face was there, gazing over my shoulder, and I noticed how red the lips were,

and that she was wearing a big pin set with an opal in her hair.

I turned sharply again. I was quite alone.

"This won't do," I said, and I remember speaking the words aloud.

I looked at the mirror, tapped it with my knuckles. It occurred to me suddenly that it was just a window.

"Of course!"

I walked round, expecting to find a little room into which the mock mirror opened. There was no room or passage; the wall was solid.

I came back, and looked in the other mirror on the left-hand side of the entry into the peristyle. The face was there.

I began to feel pretty queer, yet those mirrors fascinated me, and I went from one to the other, seeing the face of the Greek girl in each. The guide and the party reappeared and passed out.

I was looking in the right-hand mirror when I saw the girl's lips move. She seemed to be saying something, and I had a queer conviction that it was meant for me.

"What do you want?"

I could not lip read, but I watched those red lips moving.

"Who are you?"

I had quite lost my idea of the thing being absurd. The face was there, the lips moved; moreover, the more I looked at it the more strangely and distressfully familiar it became.

Suddenly, I heard a voice close to me, soft and hollow, like a wind through a half-closed window.

"Gerix—the Gaul."

I turned about sharply. There was no one there.

When I looked again into the mirror the girl's eyes seemed darker and full of a passionate yearning.

"Sappho — I am Sappho, the slave."

Something seemed to crack in my

Sappho

brain. It was like the massed memories of many generations being rolled aside, to let some ancient, tragic life flash up. A dimness of forgotten happenings seemed to swim towards the surface of my consciousness. I felt faint, and rested my hands against the wall.

"Gerix—Gerix!"

The voice came from behind me.

I turned once more, and this time the peristyle was no longer empty.

Between two of the pillars, and some three paces from where I stood, something diaphanous and hazy caught the sunlight. I can compare it to nothing but a column of mist. It did not move like smoke, and at first it had no very definite outline. It was just a greyish white blur, a little streak of fog poised illogically in the full white light of that southern day.

I was conscious of an immense curiosity. I know I was not afraid.

The column of mist grew dense. I could see that it shut off the reproduction of a statuette of a Bacchante that had been placed in the little formal garden. By stepping aside I found that the statuette and its pedestal reappeared in view.

"Gerix—Gerix!"

The voice came from that blur of mist—a voice with a strange, alluring moan to it.

I answered it:

"Sappho!"

I know now that I was suddenly possessed by an overmastering desire to see this grey mist shape itself. It was as though the dead love of some former life cried out in me passionately.

I stretched out my hands towards it.

"Sappho!"

Then I saw colours swim into the greyness like the iridescent colours on the surface of a bubble. Vague outlines appeared. There was one red point that palpitated where the

heart should be. I saw a flash of whiteness like the outline of a woman's breast. Some flame-coloured stuff was swept athwart it, seemed to drape itself and take shape. Then it was as though a veil were lifted, and I saw the face of the girl who had looked into the mirror.

She stood there, in the flesh—tall, slim, and stately, swathed in some flame-coloured fabric that was fastened over her bosom with a golden pin. She wore sandals with straps of red leather. Her masses of black hair were bound with ribbons, and she had bracelets upon her arms. Her eyes looked straight into mine out of her Greek face with its olive skin, red lips, and passionate nostrils. And those eyes of hers were like her name—great, burning eyes that made the man in me glimpse what love might be. For I belonged to her, and she to me. I was no longer the Frenchman, but the hot-souled Gaul who had looked into this girl's eyes hundreds of years ago.

She raised her naked arms, the palms of her hands turned upwards.

"Gerix—come."

Her sandalled feet moved, but they made no sound upon the paving of the colonnade as she walked swiftly into the atrium. I followed, thinking to take one of those white hands; but she went before me like a bird gliding on outspread wings. Her flame-coloured tunic seemed blown back by a wind, for it clung about her as she went, yet her sandalled feet moved so swiftly that I had to break into a run.

We came out into one of the ruined streets. There were a few tourists idling along, it with guide-books in their hands, but I saw that they did not see the Greek girl skimming, her naked arms spread and balancing her like wings. Some of these good people stared at me curiously as I blundered past them,

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for it is not easy running on a Pompeian road. It made me exult to think that that figure in the flame-coloured tunic was visible to me alone. She was mine, had been mine. Death had let her return because of me.

Now and again she looked back, beckoning.

"Run, Gerix—run!"

Somehow I knew there was some meaning in all this swift flight of ours, yet I was put to it to follow her. She took all manner of twisted ways, skimming down lanes and passages, and even through ruined houses. I felt my heart drubbing under my ribs.

"Gerix—Gerix!"

She ran through a narrow doorway, and I after her; but there was a drop of half a metre within, and I stumbled. My right foot slipped on a fragment of loose stone as I tried to recover myself. I went down heavily, and my head struck the corner of a wall.

It was dark when I recovered consciousness, dark with a darkness that did not seem to be of the night. There was a strange, sulphurous smell in the air, and the heat was like the heat of a mine. Now and again the earth trembled, and there was a sound like thunder, and I heard a roaring like the roaring of a wind.

"My God!" I thought. "Vesuvius is in eruption!"

I started up, only to realise that I was sitting upon a couch of skins. I was in a room, and there was someone near me. I heard the sound of a voice, and it seemed to be praying.

"Oh, Mother Eternal, have pity! Venus, Lady of Love, save him! I, Sappho, your slave, clasp your knees with my hands."

There was a crash as of a temple falling, and with the thunder of that sound some other self leapt into my

brain. I was armed. A breastplate of steel plates covered my chest, my thighs were bare, my legs cased in greaves. I stretched out my right hand and touched a naked sword that lay on the skins at my side.

"Sappho!"

The darkness gave back a girl's cry. Then she was beside me, a warm and passionately clinging thing whose body smelt of some sweet perfume. My arms were round her, and her lips were pressed to mine.

"Gerix—love——"

"Where am I?"

"By the temple of Venus. We fled from the amphitheatre. You had slain Daces. Then a falling stone struck you; I dragged you in here. Oh — the Mountain — the Mountain!"

How was it that I knew that I was a gladiator, that I had fought for the prize-money to buy Sappho her freedom, that Gigas the secutor loved her with a beast's love, and that I should have fought with him but for the Mountain.

Wailing voices went by, voices that were like the voices of the damned. There was a noise like a deluge of rain upon the roof. The room was full of stifling smoke.

"Light, light! To the sea!"

I struggled up, one arm round Sappho's body.

"I have a torch; there is a lamp still burning."

She fled away, and I groped for my sword.

The torchlight showed her to me in all her beauty, but it was a beauty of anguish in which love struggled with dread. I flung one arm round her, and the torchlight was in her eyes.

"Gerix, save me! Oh — the horror——"

"The sea-gate!"

"Yes, the sea-gate!"

As we pushed out into the street a gust of wind blew the torch flame

Sappho

all askew. Then came a powdering down of cinders that stung like hail. The street reeked with them, and Sappho's light sandals did not save her feet.

"Gerix—I burn."

My sandals were shod with iron studs to give a grip of the arena sand, and I picked her up in my arms while she held the torch. Houses were burning, but they were mere blurred patches of light in the midst of a most appalling smother of darkness. The fine dust and the showers of cinders blotted out everything.

We paid no heed to the other people in the streets. They rushed by us, they fell, they blundered against each other. A negro tried to snatch at our torch, and I cut at him with my sword. Once I stumbled over the body of a child, and the little thing whimpered; but I did not stop. Pompeii had turned into Hades—a black underworld smitten with fire and smoke, a world in which mad figures rushed hither and thither, coming and going in the gloom like ghosts.

The air was stifling. I made Sappho cover her mouth and nostrils with her scarf.

I had made the main street, and was going down towards the sea-gate when a press of soldiers going at the double hurled me aside. They cursed as they ran, their harness clattering.

"Make way!"

"Use your swords, comrades."

They had left me behind by no more than thirty paces when fire out of heaven came down into the street. Whether it was lightning, or some molten mass out of the mountain's heart I cannot say; but it lit the street like daylight for the moment, and I saw the soldiers' casques and harness all aglow like brass. There was a crash like the shivering of metal, and utter blackness, out of which came not a single

sound. The men had been struck dead as they ran.

I had swerved aside into the doorway, and we sheltered there, panting, and holding each other close. Sappho's voice was a moan.

"Gerix, the Mountain! Oh, Mother Venus, have pity."

I set my teeth and struggled on, though my eyes smarted and my throat and nostrils felt choked with the fumes. I passed the soldiers lying, and I saw that one man had no head. Then we came towards the sea-gate, and from it came a sound as though it were one of the pits of Hades.

The sound was like one great, never-ceasing moan, and as I reeled down the slope of the street I learnt what that sound portended. People were packed there in hundreds. It was a blind, struggling, witless mass that writhed, and fought, and panted, men climbing upon men, trampling upon women and children. They were like beasts in a pit, smothering each other in their fury to escape.

I turned back.

"Death lies that way," I said.

Sappho shouted in my ear:

"The Stabian Gate! Try the Stabian Gate."

We struggled back, buffeting our way against the dim figures that came rushing out of the gloom. A fat man fell at my feet, with his iron money-box under him. A half-naked negress ran against me, jabbering. By a tavern I saw a litter with a woman lying half in it, her head and her trailing arms upon the stones. A naked baby had been thrown into the gutter.

A sudden light grew as I gained the forum—the glare of some great building burning. The broad space seemed empty, and the rain of dust and ashes had lessened for the moment. The broken pillars of a temple showed against the glare.

Then, straight before me, I saw a

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man come leaping. A great brazen helmet was on his head, a gladiator's helmet, its face-piece pierced with holes. His harness glittered in the light of the burning buildings, and his huge naked thighs looked white as marble. He had his short, leaf-shaped sword in his hand.

He stopped before us, his great helmet rolling from side to side.

"Gerix!"

His voice was like the roar of one of the beasts in the cages. I heard Sappho cry out, felt her body stiffen in my arms.

"It is Gigas!"

Then the man laughed and spread his arms.

"I have thee, Gerix. Put the girl down. By all the gods she shall be mine! She shall go in my arms to Hades!"

Sappho slipped from me, and I gripped my sword. We were to fight, here, in this smothering city, instead of on the sand of the arena.

Gigas had his helmet. I was bareheaded. Sappho stood rigid, holding the torch.

Then Gigas came at me, and my sword met his.

I struck for his thigh, and saw the red blood show. He was fond of the point was Gigas, but I knew his tricks. Once he struck me upon the breastplate, but the good metal held. I laid the edge upon his neck, and heard him snarl like a leopard.

I should have beaten him had I not stumbled over a cloak some accursed fool had dropped. My guard was down for the moment, and Gigas slashed at my head. I staggered aside—and fell.

But my eyes were clear, and I had a vision of Sappho plucking the dagger from her girdle. I saw her strike Gigas upon the armpit where his harness did not cover him. I saw him turn and stab at Sappho with his sword.

She gave a low cry, swung round, dropped her dagger, and tottered

towards me. I saw her face swim towards mine through a kind of mist. Then she was in my arms, lying upon me, her lips pressed to mine.

"Gerix, Gerix—I come—to you—I come——"

Then her warm body seemed to melt with me into a blackness that was death.

I woke to find myself lying in a half-darkened room, the windows open, but one of the shutters closed to keep off the glare of the sun. My head was bandaged and propped upon two pillows, and there were a table and a chair beside the bed.

Through the unshuttered half of the window I had a view of the great bay, blue and tranquil, with the Sorrento coast a deep amethyst in the distance. I knew that I was in Naples, and high up above the Riviera di Chiaia, for I could see the far curve of the city glimmering along the fringe of the bay.

I lay there wondering. At first a peculiar tranquillity possessed me; everything was so calm and still. Then the blue distance seemed to draw my thoughts. Over yonder lay Castellamare, ruined Pompeii, and all that tragic coast. I felt a throbbing in my head; unforgettable memories came back. I lifted my hands, and cried out:

"Sappho!"

The door opened softly, and I saw Etienne Dubois standing there, looking at me. He was my good friend and a French doctor in Rome. He smiled and came towards me.

"This is better, Prosper. You are awake."

I looked at Etienne, and my heart was full of a strange hopelessness.

"Where am I?"

"In a room of your Naples hotel. You must not talk, old fellow."

"Tell me."

Sappho

He looked at me searchingly, and judged that I was to be humoured.

"They found you in Pompeii, with a cut across your forehead. You must have fallen and struck your head. Well, Signor Fratini knew what to do; he wired for me. And now everything is all right."

It was absurd, but there were tears in my eyes. I felt that I had suffered some irreparable loss. Yet I could not tell Etienne; he would have thought me mad.

"It was good of you to come," I said.

"Nonsense! I have got you a charming nurse."

This angered me. I felt petulant.

"I don't want a woman fussing here."

"Well, well—it is necessary. Besides—she is a very good nurse."

He sat awhile, touched my hand, and then went out, after telling me that there was no need to worry, and all that I had to do was to eat and sleep.

Perhaps an hour had passed, when I heard the door open very gently. I guessed it was the nurse, and I closed my eyes. I heard her come softly to the bed and bend over me. I heard the sound of her breathing, and her nearness stirred in me a mysterious, psychic pain.

She moved away towards the window. Curiosity made me open my eyes.

She was resting her hands on the sill, and leaning forward slightly, looking out over the sea. She had dark hair, masses of it, piled up under her nurse's cap. Her figure was slim and graceful.

The whole poise seemed extraordinarily familiar. I saw her profile, and the blood seemed to cease from my heart. She had the same low, straight forehead, the same delicate nose with its passionate nostrils, the same red lips, the same white throat and chin.

"Sappho!"

She turned quickly and looked at me, and I lay speechless. It was Sappho, with her burning eyes, her black brows, and low, pale forehead. A kind of fog came over me.

Then I heard her speaking, and the voice was the voice of Sappho.

"Monsieur Gerault. Is there anything that you wish?"

She spoke in French, and I lay and looked at her.

"Pardon; you are French?" I asked.

"No, monsieur; Neapolitan, which is Greek."

I stretched out a hand, and as though to soothe me she gave me hers.

"Sappho!"

"Monsieur, how do you know my name?"

"It is—Sappho?"

"Yes."

"Signorina," I said, "it is incredible. You are incredible. No; I am not mad. Some day I will tell you—why—it seems incredible. Will you sit at the window—often—where I can see you?"

She looked at me and smiled.

"Why, yes, if it will help you to get well."

I was sitting in my chair one day by the window, when I told Sappho all I had to tell. We were looking across the bay towards Pompeii and the Sorrento coast.

Our hands met and held.

"Do you think that I have been—mad?" I asked her.

"No—— It is incredible—and yet——"

"Who knows?"

"Yes; who knows. We may be but the children of yesterday—reborn."

She turned to me suddenly, and her eyes shone.

"Gerix—if we died in Pompeii——"

"We live—now," I said, "O my desire!"

WARWICK DEERING.

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GULL POINT

The Story of an Ordeal for Love

By WARWICK DEEPING

MRS. SANDEMAN was lying under the shade of the ilex tree in front of her cottage, reading a romantic play in blank verse by one of the minor poets. The book belonged to her son, one of those "wonder children" whose brilliancy was incontestable, and whose mother was a devoted fool.

He came out of the porch and down the steps to the lawn, a slim, girlish-looking youngster with a superabundance of fluffy hair and a pair of vain, blue eyes.

"I may be out for lunch, mater."

"Where are you going, dear?"

"Oh—along the cliffs. There's an Arthurian atmosphere to-day, and the sea—is lyrical."

His mother's eyes adored him.

"Have you asked Mason for some sandwiches, dear?"

Roy Sandeman frowned.

"No. There are days when food is superfluous."

Now, poets should not lie, and a young man of one-and-twenty who can speak of food as "superfluous" is in gross need of a sound smacking, even though he be a scholar of Trinity, a "Union light," and stuffed full of "lyrical emotion." Roy Sandeman was a prig, but he was a prig with possibilities. Moreover, he was in love. He had been discovering Iseults and Brunhildas and Rosamundas regularly for the last three years, but the last thing that had happened to him promised to be far more elemental and real than he guessed.

So Roy lied to his mother, and instead of taking the cliff path, doubled back up the Devon lane in the direction of Hartland Hall. The world was all green with the spring, bluebells were out in the woods, and the young bracken was springing from the turf. Roy went up towards the Hall through a rolling waste of blazing furze, in a right romantic Tristram mood, serenely forgetting the fact that he was not a Tristram in heart and muscles.

Just below the park fence he met the

Iseult of his dreams, a brown-eyed, tawny-haired young woman with a blue bathing-dress in one hand and a bath towel in the other. Her hair was blowing free, and the quick colour on her face and the free light in her frank brown eyes belonged to Nature, and not to the melancholy world of the tragic minor poet.

"Hallo, Tiny!"

Roy Sandeman blushed, but the soul in him had begun to be exasperated by her lack of romantic reverence. He wished she would not call him Tiny. It seemed in such bad taste.

"Gorgeous day, isn't it?"

"I never asked myself the question. Pierce is just behind with Sandy."

Her brother, Pierce Feverel, came along at a run, Sandy the Irish terrier trotting at his heels. Pierce was at Woolwich, a big fellow with a solid brown face and disconcertingly keen eyes. He also carried bathing toggery, and Sandy kept snapping at the towel as Pierce trailed it behind him.

"Hallo, Sandeman, ready for a swim?"

"Yes, come along, Tiny."

Roy failed in enthusiasm.

"Isn't it a bit cold?"

Pierce's blue eyes stared at him critically.

"Cold, of course it's cold, man."

"But I haven't—"

Lynette was laughing.

"Bashful Tiny! I have a spare dress down in the hut. I'll lend it you. Come along."

Roy had no excuses to offer. It was impossible to tell the Feverels that he didn't much like cold water, that he was a poor swimmer, and that he was a little bit afraid of the sea. The Feverels were not people to whom one could make such confessions, and Roy Sandeman was in love.

But the serenity of his self-admiration had not been disturbed as yet. He looked on Pierce as an amiable barbarian, and Lynette as a sort of Devonian Belphebe. No one had ever criticised him, and at Cambridge he belonged to a rather unhealthy

unathletic set that was more interested in Baudelaire than in who might be the head of the river in the May races.

"Fine Celtic feeling about that coast line. I'm a Celt, you know."

His egotism had a delightful sententiousness that annoyed Pierce Feverel. He disliked Roy's posturings and self-enthusiasms, for Feverel was utterly English.

"Well—I shouldn't boast about it."

His eyes glinted humorously, but a sense of humour was one of the things that lay latent in Roy Sandeman.

"You don't believe in the Celtic spirit? Why, it is going to reinspire England."

"That's all right then. But how do you work Sandeman into Welsh or Cornish?"

Roy fell at once into a furious and eloquent explanation of how and whence Welsh blood had come to him. And then Lynette started laughing. He could not understand why Lynette should laugh.

"But it's perfectly true. I don't see where the jest comes in."

He met Pierce's eyes, and there was something in their blue stare that was extraordinarily disconcerting.

"Oh, you queer idiot, Tiny!"

Roy was shocked. Never in his life had he felt idiotic, and certainly a young woman like Lynette Feverel had no right to see anything idiotic in a man who had published a small book of poems, and who led an intellectual group at Cambridge.

But they were scrambling down the steep path to Hartland Cove, and Roy happened to notice that a stiffish sea was running.

"Rather rough to-day."

"Rough? No, that's just about right. When once you get through some of those big ones—it's grand outside."

It was while he was undressing with Pierce in one of the little cabins above the private bathing-place belonging to the Hall, that Roy Sandeman realised that he was a creature of limitations. Of course there were certain things he had shirked doing, such as playing footer at school, or daring the stiffer climbs in Switzerland, but his mother had thought him delicate, and he had told himself that he was not interested in such activities. Yet in that little bathing-cabin on the edge of Hartland Cove, Nature took her child by the scruff of the neck and made him look at himself in a new sort of mirror.

"Hurry up, you slackers."

Pierce pulled the door open, and Roy had a glimpse of Lynette running barelegged along a rocky breakwater that jutted into deep water. There was a drop of about five feet, and Lynette took her dive, to come up with wet hair shining in the sunlight. Her brother followed her, but Roy Sandeman hung back, hugging himself, and looking through half-closed lids at the white ridged blue of the sea.

He had never dived in his life. In fact, he had always funk'd it, and gone sneaking down the steps to dabble his way in at his leisure.

There were steps here cut in the rock, and leading to a kind of natural pool sheltered from the rush of the sea. Roy edged his way towards them, while the Feverels watched him.

"I say it's brisk to-day, Lyn. What a prig that young Sandeman is."

"He is—rather."

"Hallo, it's to be the steps. I rather think that child is a funk, Sis."

"I suppose he can swim."

"He's funking the dive—anyhow."

Lynette's eyes darkened suddenly.

"I do hate—that—in a man. What is there to be afraid of?"

Roy made his entry by way of the steps, and in doing it became conscious of a novel sense of shame. A sudden sulkiness seized him. He swam slowly and clumsily towards the Feverels, who were playing about in the calm water waiting for him to join them.

"Come on, Tiny."

An exuberant white arm and the rallying pitch of her voice angered him.

"This is good enough for me."

"Come along. It's grand—out-side."

Then Roy Sandeman lied to her.

"My heart is rather crocky. I think I'll stay here."

The Feverels said nothing. They swam out and left him, two glorious healthy young people racing each other over the blue-green turmoil of the sea.

Roy slunk out after a little desultory splashing, dried himself on Pierce's towel and began to dress. He was angry with himself and angry with the Feverels, but his self-love rose in petulant revolt.

"Of course—they are just savages. Anybody can do that sort of thing if they want to."

GULL POINT.

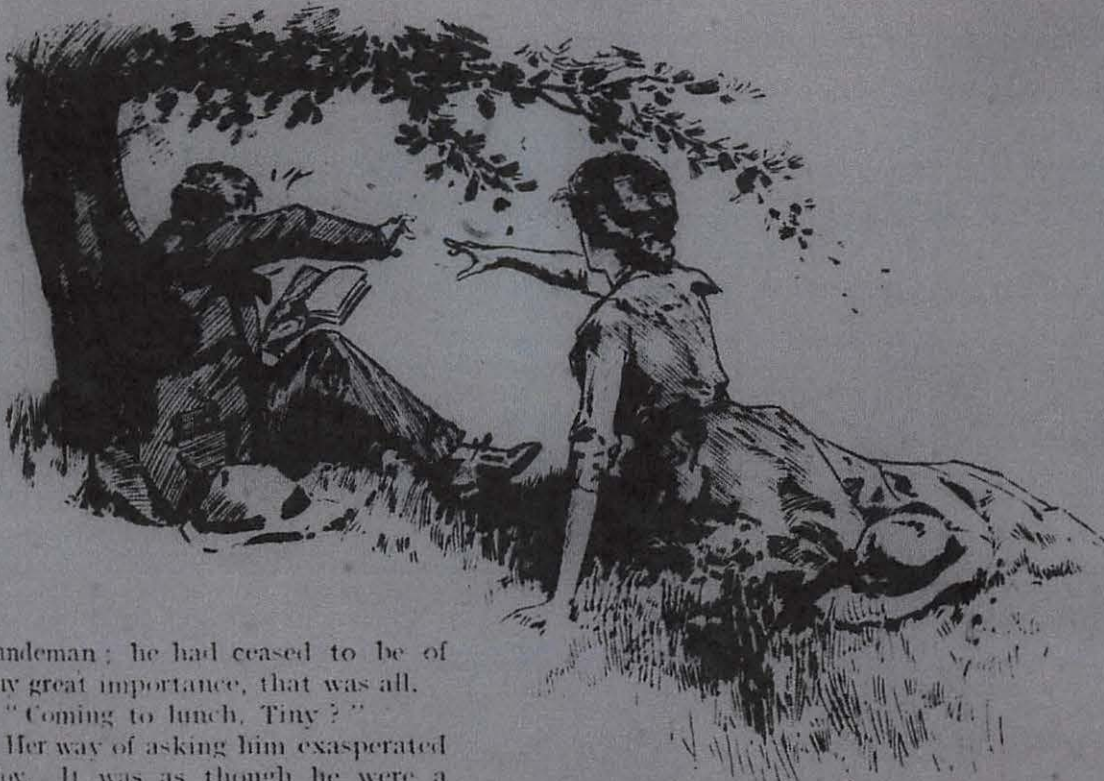
He fastened his tie, plastered down his long hair, and went and sat in the sun.

When Lynette and her brother joined him from the bathing-cabins they had little to say. Roy was sensitive and quick enough to feel the change in the psychical temperature, and to realise vaguely what had happened. A sense of chilliness made itself felt. These two young people strolled on casually up the path; they had no desire to actively snub and subdue Roy

"Thinking—is doing things," he said arrogantly. "Of course if you want to play the squirrel in a cage, turning a wire wheel round, it may seem very important. But I'm out for leadership——"

Then Pierce Feverel threw back his head and laughed.

"You really are a priceless jest," he said. "I should like to see you handling a battery of field guns. You could do your observing stunt all right."



Sandeman; he had ceased to be of any great importance, that was all.

"Coming to lunch, Tiny?"

Her way of asking him exasperated Roy. It was as though he were a dog, and she was offering him a bit of biscuit.

"Thanks; I will."

His egotism grew combative, aggressive. For the first time in his life he had chanced upon a gross lapse in his own self-respect, and the realisation of it drove him to recover the lost ground by fresh self-assertion.

"You two were quite classic this morning. I like to watch other people doing things."

Pierce gave him a peculiar look.

"You see, art is contemplative. If one has big ideas one has to climb a hill, and watch life going on below. That's what Goethe did."

Lynette tossed her wet hair.

"Glad we performed nicely. You are a very superior sort of being, Tiny. But don't you ever want to do things?"

"When he tried to read poetry to her she pelted him with grass"—p. 731

"I could do it. It's only chess—with a difference."

"Yes, with a difference."

Feverel met his sister's eyes.

"It may be dangerous, you know. Not the sort of thing one writes about in books."

During the days that followed, Mrs. Sandeman was unable to understand her son's extreme moodiness.

"Aren't you quite well, dear?"

"I'm perfectly well, mother."

"Is it the creative spirit?"

"I'm thinking out a problem, mater."

She smiled adoringly over his deep genius, and scolded Mason for making too much noise with the lawn-mower.

THE QUIVER

Roy's problem was Lynette and his own growing infatuation. He had tried to make open love to her, romantic love, and she was behaving with merciless waywardness. He had lost himself to that wild, tawny hair of hers, her elf's eyes, and her mischievous red mouth, and she was tormenting him, knowing that it was good for Roy Sandeman to be tormented. But Roy had not reached that state of wisdom. Each day his self-love was being wounded; he was puzzled, exasperated; for a young man who has been badly spoilt, and who has been taught to consider himself flawless, is apt to suffer severely when someone undertakes to tell him the truth.

Merciless sincerity, and a love of courage! Lynette had a kind of passionate prejudice in favour of these virtues. They were finely developed in Pierce her brother; they were almost absent in Roy Sandeman.

And yet she had a queer liking for Roy. It was a question of contrasts. His priggishness and his conceit angered her, and so Roy Sandeman's love-making became a pilgrimage of humiliation and of pain.

"Come out riding, Tiny. We can mount you all right."

"Thanks, I don't ride."

She always seemed to be discovering his "don'ts," nor did she care a whisk of the head for his "positives." When he tried to read poetry to her she pelted him with grass. And yet her wild, vixenish humour made him more desperately keen to please her.

"Perhaps you will come up and play croquet, Tiny."

Yes, he could play croquet.

"I thought that would be about your level."

He flushed and writhed.

"What a little savage you are, Lyn."

"I'm not a savage, and you need not call me Lyn."

"Very well, Miss Feverel. And I prefer to be known as Roy."

"That's too regal. Tiny suits you better."

And he had been writing a poem about Tristram, and the heroic splendour of that great lover's strength!

Pierce Feverel was absolutely frank in his views on the situation.

"How you can bother about that confounded prig, Lyn, passes my comprehension."

Lynette looked wise.

"He is not such a bad boy, Pierce. Of course, he's an awful ass, and not particularly plucky."

"That's what disgusts me. He has never been kicked. He doesn't know that he belongs to the order of worms."

"Don't you begin being an athletic prig, dear brother."

"Sorry, Lyn. You can always hit straight. But what do you imagine you are going to do with young Sandeman?"

"I don't imagine anything," she said.

She didn't. Nature had just thrown these two youngsters together, and Roy Sandeman was getting the very finest schooling in the world. There was spirit in the lad, and an element of greatness, otherwise Lynette's fierce intuition would have passed him by.

Then came a very shameful day for Roy Sandeman. It was the afternoon before Pierce Feverel's leave came to an end. They went along the cliffs towards Gull Point, and Lynette, who was in one of her most impish moods, chose to play at walking on the wall.

This same wall was built of flat stones wedged together on the very edge of the cliff. One false step, and you might go hurtling down on to the rocks a hundred feet below. Pluck and a steady head were needed.

Roy watched her with sickly fascination. She challenged him to follow her, while Pierce bit his pipe-stem hard and kept a keen eye on his sister.

"Come along, Tiny."

But he blankly and absolutely refused.

"I call that idiotic."

"It isn't. It's good training."

She turned and saw his white face, and the fear in his eyes. And suddenly she sprang down and walked on along the path.

"I don't want to frighten you," she said.

They went on to Gull Point. Roy Sandeman smitten with a sudden horror of self-realisation. For the first time for many years he was just a stark, naked figure of unclothed self-consciousness. He knew what he had never known before, that it was possible for a girl to despise him and to be justified in her contempt.

Pierce Feverel leant over the wall before they reached the tip of Gull Point. The path had just dropped to the bottom of a

deep coombe where a stream trickled into the sea, and then carried them skywards with a swift steepness that had left Roy short of breath.

"The sea's down. What about the Gull Point stunt, Lyn?"

"Do you value your trousers?"

"They are nothing great. Here goes."

He scrambled over the wall and disappeared. Lynette climbed up on the wall to watch him, for the Gull Point stunt was spectacular and dangerous. It began with the "knife edge" down which one straddled some sixty feet to the "pulpit," a grass covered mass of rock standing out like a bastion a hundred feet above the sea. Next came the "zig-zag," a sort of natural path or ledge along the face of the cliff, sloping to another mass of rock where the "fire escape" began. The "fire escape" was a sort of sloping trough down which one slid with elbows and feet spread out and pressed against the walls. It brought one to a jumble of rocks and the sea.

Roy Sandeman craned his head over the wall. Pierce was sliding down the "knife edge," knees and hands gripping the rock. It was like sliding down the ridge of a steep roof, with the sea and the rocks more than a hundred feet below.

"What's the use?"

Roy was white faced and thin lipped, and his eyes were full of a fear of the depths below.

"Idiotic!"

Lynette turned her head with a proud, sharp lifting of the chin.

"Idiotic? It's nothing of the kind. It means courage. What is the use of

anything without nerve and pluck?"

"But there is nothing to be gained, nothing at the end of it."

"Try it—and see."

Roy gave a thin, sulky laugh.

"I hope I have too much moral courage," he said.

But his moral courage did not save him from going back to his mother's cottage in a fine fever of doubt and mortification. He had seen Pierce Feverel come climbing up the mouth of the coombe, wet to the knees, his trousers torn, and a hard light in his blue eyes. He had heard Lynette hail him triumphantly.

"Great sport. You did good time, too."

The absurdity of the whole thing! It was like a small boy showing off. But was it?

Roy spent half the night fighting the problem, tormented by the knowledge that he was a coward, and that Lynette was the most tempestuously adorable thing with her adventurous eyes and her wild blowing hair. Had the heroines of the romances been made of such stuff, and was that why

such men as Tristram, had fought to the death for them?

His young vanity once more flared into a mood of aggression. Lynette's lack of seriousness and her ridiculing of his dignity were not to be borne; her irresponsible self-confidence would have to be fought and tamed. He must make her realise what manner of man he was, a genius who would be crowned with fame while that big, barbaric brother of hers wallowed in obscurity.

Roy waited a day or so to make sure that Pierce Feverel had left the Hall. Pierce might be a great, muscular

savage, but he had a very awesome and depressing effect on Roy Sandeman.

"I want the beast out of the way. You can't fight a thing without a soul."

He began to feel unpleasantly nervous as he followed the path through the furze. More than once he hesitated, and stood



"Someone has been telling me the truth about myself," he said"—p. 737.

Drawn by E. P. Kinsella.

staring out over the sea. After all—what was he afraid of, a mere girl of seventeen, a girl whose impulsive sincerity refused to be kept within bounds?

"I shall ask her straight out," he said to himself, jerking his chin in the air, and clenching his fists in his trousers pockets.

"Good morning, Mr. Sandeman."

He swung round, and there she was, a white figure amid the furze, her eyes staring straight into his. He made a spasmodic clutch at his straw hat. His poise was not so perfect as he could have wished.

"Good morning. I was coming to see you."

She just stood there and looked at him with provoking serenity.

"Suppose we go for a walk. I want to talk to you about something."

"Do you?"

"Something of great importance."

Her eyes lit up queerly, and Roy felt a sudden, unbidden impulse prompting him to make a sincere and unstudied ass of himself. He struggled with that human and unscholarly impulse. It was necessary that Lynette should be impressed, that he should behave like a man of the world.

"Shall we go down to the lane?"

"Why not talk here?"

"I will try to humour your wishes. But I am going to be very severe with you, Lynette."

"Severe! Why don't you stop being such a prig?"

"I'm not a prig."

"The worst I've ever met. No, don't look hot and astonished."

"But I'm not a prig."

She looked at him with deadly frankness.

"That's the trouble. You don't know what a prig you are. You are a mass of conceit, though what you have got to be conceited about—heaven knows."

Roy's dignity began to crumble badly, and he was losing his temper.

"Very well, let us go into everything. Do you know that I am a scholar of Trinity, that I have published poems, that I have made some of the most brilliant speeches at the 'Union'?"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"There you go—at once. Boasting, puffing yourself out. And you think you're in love with me."

Roy's face melted in scarlet amazement.

"Well—upon my soul!"

"Don't look so annoyed. You can give up being in love with me."

"But I refuse. I shall insist on being in love with you. And some day you are going to marry me."

It was her turn to show a quick flush of colour.

"You—marry—me! How preposterous! Why, you would have to be made over again."

"Preposterous! I should like you to point out my very gross deficiencies."

"I will. Don't you know them?"

"No."

"Then you ought to. Then—there might be hope. Why, you are a coward, you shirk things."

"Lynette!"

"Isn't it true? How can a woman think anything of a man when he funks things? It doesn't matter how clever he is, it doesn't matter how well he talks——"

Her eyes searched his, not unkindly, and Roy's failed to bear their scrutiny. He knew, suddenly and shamefully, that she was speaking the truth.

"I don't see the use of showing off," he said.

"But you are always showing off, with your tongue. Why, if I were a man, and I felt afraid to do a certain thing—I'd make myself do it, or feel ashamed for ever."

"Oh—you—yes——"

"Well, I wouldn't be a coward. It's so pitiable. People must have spoilt you, Roy——"

Her voice had changed its tone, and then a strange thing happened to Roy Sandeman. His romantic complacency seemed to crumple up beneath her blows. He threw himself down on the grass, hid his face in his arms, and blubbered.

Lynette stared at him, with a sudden loss of colour.

Then she sat down on the grass quite close to him.

"That's better, much better."

"You're a beast!"

"No, I'm not. I'm awfully sorry for you, Roy. I had to be honest. No one ever seems to have hurt you before; it's what you wanted. You have been wearing cotton wool."

His shoulders heaved.

"For heaven's sake, go away."

"Shall I?"

"Yes."

"Don't be sorry for yourself, or you'll be worse than before."

"Oh, go away."

"Very well, I will."

Many of us never attain to that humiliating self-knowledge that saves us from being complete and perfect fools. An enthusiast can be as greatly against himself as he was for himself, after some shocking *dénouement* has left him wondering at his own idiocy; and so it proved with Roy Sandeman. He had been mercilessly chastised, but those moments of chastisement developed in him a new humility, and a faintly smiling sense of humour.

He sat up and stared at the sea.

"Of course I'm a coward. She was quite right there. But I didn't know——"

He meditated deeply.

"What a lot of rot I have written! Heroic stuff, and I hadn't the nerve to walk along that wall! Of course she's right, absolutely right. I seem to have got lost somewhere."

He was undergoing the supreme test, when a man hesitates between greatness and littleness of outlook. All the future was implied in that small quarrel amid the furze on that Devon hill-side. But the spirit that Lynette had roused in him answered her challenge and carried him through.

Mrs. Sandeman had one of the great surprises of her life.

"Mother, you have been spoiling me."

"My dear——!"

"It's a fact. You have given up all kinds of things for my sake. You ought to have sent me to a public school."

"My dear, what has happened to you?"

Roy went and kissed her.

"Someone has been telling me the truth about myself. I suppose I have been a prig. I know I'm a coward."

"Coward? You, child—a coward!"

"Yes, undoubtedly. You see, I have never been hardened, made to do things that I did not like doing. I have got to alter that. You have been much too gentle with me, mater dear."

Mrs. Sandeman burst into tears.

"Why, you are accusing me! I'm sure I haven't——"

"You have been the dearest mater in the

world. I owe everything to you, but you couldn't kick me, as a man wants kicking at times."

He fell a-laughing a little hysterically.

"Of course you couldn't, mater; but somebody else has done it for you. Yes, it was just touch and go for a moment, but the medicine has worked in the right way. For goodness' sake don't cry. I'm not going to let you give up so much for me in the future."

"Dear boy, you must tell me everything."

And he told her.

Two days later Roy Sandeman went up to Hartland Hall. He asked for Lynette, and was told that she was in the garden.

"If you go down the rock walk, sir, and along to the rose garden, I think you will be finding her."

Roy found her. She had a basket and a pair of scissors, and was snipping off roses and collecting them in her basket. She looked at Roy with frank and interested eyes.

He raised his hat, and coloured hotly.

"I hope you don't mind my hunting you out here. I want to apologise."

"Oh!"

"You were quite right the other day. I have been going in for some self-criticism. I am glad you said what you did."

Her eyes brightened to his.

"I'm afraid I was rather a beast. This is sporting of you."

"Is it? I think I want teaching to be a sportsman. I am going to begin this morning; I suppose you wouldn't come and help?"

She deliberated, and he watched her eagerly.

"I know it will be a great favour, and I don't deserve it."

"You didn't, two days ago. Are you in earnest, Roy?"

He answered with passion.

"Of course I'm in earnest. I have got to conquer this cowardice, this shrinking part of me; and Lynette, I'll try to give up being a prig."

"That's splendid! Of course I'll help. What shall we do?"

"We'll go along the cliffs," he said doggedly. "I am going to begin there."

Now when they came towards Gull Point, and Lynette realised what he meant to do,

she would have persuaded him not to dare "the great stunt."

"You want to be in perfect condition, Roy. I remember the first time Pierce tried it, I thought he was going to get killed. It all depends on your muscles holding out. Leave it for a week, and go into training."

But he had worked himself up to the ordeal, and would not be discouraged.

"It has got to be done now, to-day. I'm at white heat, and I think if I shirked it this morning, I should be worse off next time."

Her attitude had quite changed to him. She felt that he was making a great fight against his physical cowardice, and that she would best help him by helping his courage.

"It's splendid of you, Roy. You want to take your time about it. When you get to the 'pulpit,' stop and rest. Have you nails in your boots?"

"No."

"So much the better."

They had reached the point above the "knife edge," and Roy climbed on to the wall. He tossed his hat to Lynette, and buttoned up his coat. He was very pale, and his eyes had a hard, staring light in them.

"Good-bye!"

She laid his hat among the bracken, and gave him both her hands.

"You'll do it, Roy. Don't hurry. And when you get to the 'fire escape,' dig your feet and elbows against the sides."

"All right."

He let himself down from the wall, and straddled the top of the grey stone ridge. On either side of him the cliff fell steeply to the blue of the sea, but Roy dared not look downwards for fear of losing his nerve. He clung with arms, knees and feet to the "knife edge," and slid slowly down it, like a rider lying on the neck of his horse.

Lynette watched him, immensely anxious, and wholly his friend. She saw him reach the grass cap of the "pulpit," and crouch down there as though the huge cliff face and the wildness of the deeps below frightened him.

She waved and shouted.

"Splendid!"

Roy's face looked very white and small as he gazed up at her. He stood up, and prepared to tackle the "zig-zag," conscious

of an impending panic and a desperate desire to have the ordeal over and done with.

The "zig-zag" looked more dangerous than it really was, and a mountaineer would have negotiated it without thinking, but it provided Roy Sandeman with the most horrible five minutes of his life. His imagination was dominated by those knobby black rocks below. How they would smash a soft body falling on them! He had to edge along the path with his back against the cliff; sweat ran from him, and he felt broken at the knees. Moreover there was a horrible sense of loneliness, of utter personal responsibility. No one could help him out of the scrape; he had to set his teeth and make good.

And make good he did, reaching the head of the "fire escape," with a dead-white, clammy face, and a body that shook with excitement. The "fire escape" was a comparatively simple affair. Lynette saw him slide down it and land with a splash in the shallow water.

She waved his hat at him, gave a cheer, and ran to meet him at the mouth of the coombe.

But she did not discover an exultant hero. Roy Sandeman had been most furiously sick, and he was lying in the grass beside the stream with a face the colour of chalk.

"Well done."

She went and dipped her handkerchief in the stream, and laid it on his forehead.

"Feeling better, Roy?"

He looked at her with a flicker of a smile.

"I say, I'm finding my level. There's something in pluck, after all."

She bent over him with a radiant look.

"But you have conquered yourself. Isn't that splendid?"

"I don't feel like boasting."

"Don't you know that men who get the real grit, by doing dangerous things, don't boast?"

His face lit up.

"Of course! I'm beginning to see all that. I'm awfully grateful to you, Lynette."

She looked wisely out to sea.

"I think I shall like you, Roy, if you go on doing things, and not talking about them."

He held out a hand.

"I'll promise that, Lynette. Shake."

She shook.

The Raiders

They came to England—primarily for petrol—but they got much more than they bargained for

By Warwick Deeping

THE conning tower of a submarine rose slowly out of the sea and remained stationary, like a sharp black rock projecting out of the water.

The hatchway was swung open and the head and shoulders of a man appeared.

Night had fallen. There was no moon, and haze hid the stars. The day had been sultry and still, and the sea looked like black oil, rising and falling almost imperceptibly with a slight swell. Northwards an intense darkness suggested land, and away on the north-west the lights of a town shone dimly.

Lieutenant Kreutzer stood there for ten minutes, listening and peering into the darkness. U53 had come to the end of her tether. For five days she had suffered from the chance malice of a series of coincidences and the untiring attentions of sundry English destroyers and patrol boats. She had been hounded away from her secret base, shepherded into the Channel, and worried to exhaustion in a game of hide-and-seek. Her fuel tanks were all but empty, and her commander had groped his way towards the English coast, waited for the night, and then come up to consider a desperate situation.

He began to whisper to someone below him.

"It is nearly pitch dark, Block. I can hear nothing and see nothing. The coast lies north of us, and there is a town to the north-west."

"How is the sea?"

"Flat as a table; just a little swell."

"We had better come up."

'Pass the order down. No talking and no smoking.'

The submarine rose till her dark hull was awash. Kreutzer climbed out on to the deck, and Lieutenant Otto Block followed him. Kreutzer had the face of a bird of prey, but Block was the typical cartoon German, fat, sallow, greasy, with boot-brush hair and pale, dead eyes. As a student he had been known as "Pimples."

He carried the scars of many duels, and the reputation of having been the most adventurous blackguard in his corps.

"Land to the north; and a town, by those lights."

"The coast of Devon."

Block spat into the sea.

"These English swine! We shall have to surrender to-morrow unless we can do something. The devil! but it makes one's blood boil; those infernal destroyers had all the luck."

Kreutzer stared landwards.

"If we could get some fuel."

"On land—there? What an idea, and what a jest! Seize the stuff and cheat the swine with their own petrol. What town is that?"

"It should be Huntercombe."

"Where's Muller? He knows all this coast like his own garden. Let us have him up."

So Muller was called up from below, a smart, peak-bearded, handsome man, with hard blue eyes and a little frown. The lights and the coast were pointed out to him and he was told to say his say.

"That's Huntercombe there. Do you know the country, Muller?"

"Every corner, sir. I was chauffeur at a big house over there for two years, and I made maps."

"What lies in front of us?"

"Wild coast, sir."

"Any big house, in a lonely place, where petrol might be had?"

Muller's frown deepened and his eyes flashed.

"I remember, sir. Over there lies Thrift Cove, and half a mile from it stands Moor Hall, a big house where cars were kept. It is very lonely——"

Block gave a gloating laugh.

"Thunder, but what an adventure! It would be worth it, on the off chance. The coast may be poorly patrolled, and it's dark enough for any game. Of course, we might find no petrol, but we could not be in a worse mess."

"Do you know the way, Muller?"

"Perfectly, sir."

"Would you volunteer for the job, lieutenant?"

"Overjoyed, my dear comrade."

If the night was still at sea, it was no less still in the wild valley where the Leighs of Moor Hall had lived for more than a hundred years. The wash of the sea made a soft, wet murmur along the rocks of Thrift Cove, but the sound lost itself in the woods, and died to nothingness before it reached the grey walls of the Moor Hall garden.

Captain Amyas Leigh, christened after Kingsley's hero, walked up and down the long lawn below the terrace, breathing in the stillness and the perfume of the place. Two nights ago he had been in the trenches, watching flares go up and listening to the grim and spiteful spatter of rifle fire. His wife was to join him at Moor Hall that night. His leave had been unexpected; he had wired to her on landing, and found that she was staying with friends in Wales. She was travelling all the way by car, and from the lawn Captain Leigh could see the road winding down the valley. He was watching for the lights of the car, waiting with all the impatience of the lover and the deeper tenderness of the husband.

They had been married a year ago, and he had not seen Jasmine for five months. Her picture was in the breast pocket of his tunic, but now he was to see and touch the real woman, the woman who at times had seemed a dream. Life was very good that night. He felt exultant, grateful, and full of that fine gentleness that war breeds in the hearts of strong men. He loved the grass under his feet, the dim outlines of the wind-blown firs, the smell of the roses, the grey bulk of the old house. He could walk under the open sky without fear; he had five clean, wholesome days in front of him; he was in love with his wife.

Now and again he stopped to listen for the sound of the car. Once one passed along the high road that crossed the ridge at the head of the valley, and belched forth discords from its Klaxon horn; but Leigh knew the sound of his own hooter, and the three short blasts that Hartland, his chauffeur, always gave. It was nearly nine o'clock, and Amyas Leigh began to be anxious.

Old Clegg, the butler, came down the

steps from the terrace. He was the only manservant left in the house.

"Will you wait any longer, sir, or shall I have some dinner served?"

"I'll wait, Clegg, thanks."

He began to walk up and down again, his eyes fixed on the spot on the hill where he knew he might expect to see the eyes of the car shining. Suddenly he paused and stood listening with the alert, tense air that had become habitual in the trenches. An uncannily familiar feeling stole over him. He found himself staring into the darkness at the grey garden wall hidden under the stunted firs.

"Confound it, what is happening to me? It might be No Man's Land over there. I could swear I heard men moving."

He smiled and strolled on.

"I suppose one can't live that sort of life for months without getting a little nervy. The power of association. Thank God there are no Boches within three hundred miles of Moor Hall. One has enough of the beasts out there."

He reached the end of the lawn, faced about, and then stood very still. For the round white eye of an electric torch had flashed suddenly out at him, and a voice growled in English:

"Hands up!"

Amyas Leigh's astonishment was complete, so complete that he did not move but stood staring at the shining white circle.

"I beg your pardon, are you a special constable or something? I'm an English officer walking in my own garden."

The man holding the torch repeated the order.

"Hands up! We are Germans, and the place is surrounded."

Leigh saw the muzzle of a revolver poking forward beside the torch. He put his hands up, still half suspecting the business to be a monstrous practical joke. Then a voice began speaking in German; three or four figures crowded round him out of the darkness; he had a glimpse of the uniform of a German sailor, and someone snapped a pair of handcuffs over his wrists.

The officer with the torch drew close to Amyas Leigh.

"This is a little surprising, Mr. John Bull. Yes, we are real Germans, and this is a real revolver; no cinema show. So no tricks—see?"

He had a truculent voice, and he shoved the snout of his revolver into the English-

THE RAIDERS

man's face. Block had always been a bully, and the opportunity was unique.

Captain Leigh glanced at his handcuffed wrists, and then at the dim face of the German lieutenant.

"How the devil did you get here?"

"Silence! Prisoners ask no questions."

Leigh's mouth hardened. He was passing from his momentary astonishment to a bout of swift, clear thinking. The business was real enough, most damnably real, however preposterous it might seem. He was thinking of his wife.

Then, somewhere in the house a woman screamed. Leigh started and turned his head sharply.

"Herr Lieutenant," he said.

"Silence!"

"If you care to be thought of as a gentleman, keep your men from——"

Otto Block spat in the Englishman's face.

"So much for a John Bull! The devil, but our army will be over here some day, and the pigs will be screaming. Keep quiet; I'll have no nonsense. Are you there, Muller?"

"Yes, Herr Lieutenant."

"You have surrounded the house?"

"And searched it, Herr Lieutenant. We have shut four women and one man up in the cellar. Offenbach is on guard."

Block turned on Amyas Leigh.

"How much petrol have you—up there?"

"I don't know."

"We shoot people who don't know."

"I was in France yesterday. I only arrived here to-day."

The German laughed.

"That is funny! You cannot get away from us. We will go and look for ourselves. If you make a sound, sir, or try to shout, I shall shoot you. Lead on!"



Jasmine Leigh's eyes were two round circles in her white face. She stood quite still, staring . . .

Moor Hall seemed imprisoned in the silence and the darkness of the night, shut off from all chance of succour by its own isolation. Yet coincidences were tending towards a linking up of human interferences. A sturdy child in knickers and slouch hat was doubling breathlessly up the by-road that joined the main road to Huntercombe, swelling with excitement and a wild sense of national responsibility. Months of seemingly futile keenness had been amazingly rewarded. This boy scout had seen the Germans land at Thrift Cove, and had followed them to Moor Hall.

Along the ridge came Leigh's car bearing his wife over the Devon hills. She was a little woman with a wonderful white skin and gentle, laughing eyes, a white moth, fragile and fair, yet less fragile than she looked. Her courage had often amazed Amyas. She was wonderful on a horse, with her great dark eyes alight and her pale face flushing to the wind.

"What's that, Hartland?"

"Sheep, ma'am, or——"

He slowed the car, peering through the wind-screen.

"Soldiers."

Soldiers they were, a full company out on night training, tramping in fours, full kitted, along the road. The car crawled past them, its lights shining on the muzzle of rifles and on the men's eyes as they turned their heads.

"Fine boys, ma'am. Wish I was younger."

Jasmine was thinking of her husband, and her heart hastened to him with the speeding of the car. Hartland had grown sleepy, and was less alert. He had driven a hundred and fifty miles.

"What was that?"

"What, ma'am?"

"Didn't you see a boy waving?"

"No. Besides, I don't pay no heed to boys."

They had reached the by-road and the car began to poke her nose downhill. The scout, with heart drubbing, ran on, ascribing all sorts of mysterious motives to the Moor Hall car. He ran right into the infantry plodding along the road, and in five seconds he was squeaking excitedly at a big captain who had ordered his men to halt.

"Germans, sir. I've seen 'em land at Thrift Cove. Two boat loads, sir. They're at Moor Hall!"

"What have you had for supper, Johnny?"

"It's true, sir. I heard 'em talking, and they're armed."

"Oh! come now——"

"Didn't you see that car, sir. It's turned down the lane to the hall. I bet there's a submarine out there——"

The boy was so emphatic, so eager, so sharp, that the captain began to be interested. Strange things did happen. Besides, they could do some realistic night work down in that valley, and even if the boy's tale proved to be all moonshine, there would be no harm in letting the men try some scouting in the dark.

"Com-pany, slope—arms! Quick march! No talking. Now, sonny, come along with me:"

Meanwhile Captain Amyas Leigh was standing handcuffed in his own stable yard while the Germans forced the door of the coach-house. Hartland had taken the key with him, and Leigh cursed Hartland for his conscientiousness. He wanted these Germans away before his car arrived, for the idea of Jasmine being in their power filled him with grim dread.

Otto Block was swearing at the delay.

"Hurry up, there; hurry up."

The big doors swung open at last, and the light of an electric torch showed the thrifty Hartland's store of cans. This was in the earlier days of the war, when no one worried about such a matter as the shortage of petrol. Hartland had about thirty full cans stored in the coach-house.

"Empty or full, Muller?"

"All full, Herr Lieutenant."

"That is good. Load up, men; load up."

A sailor ran in and spoke to Block in German. There was a sense of stir and of alarm. The lieutenant shouted an order; Leigh found himself seized and rushed out towards the drive. He could hear a car coming up the steep ascent, and he knew what was about to happen."

Block was speaking to him.

"What car is this?"

"Mine."

"Who is in it?"

"No one you need fear."

"No tricks—or you will be shot!"

Captain Amyas Leigh was standing in front of his own stone porch when the car drew up. The night was so dark that Leigh's wife had noticed nothing strange about her home. The headlights of the

car had shown her Amyas in a swift, sweeping gleam. She was out of the car, with hands stretched towards him, when another figure intervened. An electric torch flashed on her face and figure.

"Charmed to meet you, madam. We have been paying your husband a surprise visit."

"I beg your pardon. I——"

"Don't be afraid, dear. These gentlemen happen to be Germans."

Block struck him with the butt end of his revolver.

"Silence. Madam, your husband talks too much. See to that car, Muller."

"I am seeing to it, Herr Lieutenant."

Muller had slipped into the seat that Jasmine Leigh had left, and was pressing the muzzle of a revolver against the astonished Hartland's head.

Jasmine Leigh's eyes were two round circles in her white face. She stood quite still, staring.

"Amyas, I don't understand——"

"Madam, permit me to explain. We are German sailors, and we needed fuel for our submarine, so we came ashore on the chance of finding it. And not only have we found our fuel, but also a very charming woman, madam."

His face drew so near to hers that she felt his breath, and recoiled from him.

"Amyas——"

But Block snapped out something in German, and Leigh found two sailors grappling him from behind.

"Do not be alarmed, madam. Bring a rope, some of you. We will tie up that quarrelsome husband of yours, madam. Yes, that is better. We are in a hurry."

The men found some cordage in the stable, and Captain Leigh and Hartland, the chauffeur, were tied back to back.

"You there, Muller?"

"Yes, Herr Lieutenant."

"Call Offenbach and the rest. We must be off with the plunder."

He passed in front of Leigh's wife, and bowed to her with ironical and gloating politeness.

"Madam, no doubt it will be a great experience for you to take a voyage in a submarine. We shall be charmed to have you."

He faced round on Leigh.

"Sorry to deprive you of your wife, sir. But I assure you that she shall have all that a pretty woman can desire."

For the moment Amyas Leigh said nothing. The horror of the thing and his

own utter helplessness were like a great weight crushing his heart.

"Such things are not done, Lieutenant."

"You English are too sentimental. Madam will enjoy a most exhilarating experience, and you will be able to return to France."

Leigh shut his eyes.

"Jasmine!"

She gave a quick cry, slipped past Block, and laid her hands on his shoulders.

"Oh, my dear. Death would have been better. But I'll help you. I'll be brave."

The lieutenant muttered an order, and two sailors forced her away from Amyas Leigh. She turned passionately on Block:

"Have you Germans no wives—or sisters? Is it possible that men can do such things?"

"Madam, we are at war. We hate England. We will make the English suffer unspeakable things. Pick up those cans, men."

The men moved off into the darkness, and Amyas Leigh's eyes followed his wife's figure as though she were being snatched away from him and carried down into Hades. Lieutenant Block had loitered behind. He flashed his torch for the last time on the Englishman's face.

"Of course, I might shoot you, Mr. John Bull, but that would spoil the artistic cunning of the comedy. I shall be very gallant to your wife. Good night."

The lieutenant's footsteps died away; but a sudden breeze had sprung up, and it seemed to snigger tauntingly in the trees. For a while Amyas Leigh and the servant stood back to back, neither man trusting himself to speak to the other.

"Hartland!"

"Sir."

"Can't we break these ropes? I can't stand here like this."

"It's hell, sir. If only those soldiers were down this way."

"What soldiers, man?"

"We passed them on the upper road, sir."

"Lord! Shout, man, shout!"

Three hundred yards away the big captain and the boy scout were standing in the heather and looking across at Moor Hall.

"Hallo!"

"Listen to that, sir! Someone shouting for help."

"By George, sonny, I believe you've struck oil."

Two hundred and fifty men were lying behind him in the heather.

"Mr. Murray, take half the company and

work down towards the sea. I want fifty men with me. Mr. Vance, bring along your platoon, and let the men load with ball."

Amyas Leigh was like a man saved from the agony of a slow death by burning when those brown figures came up the drive at the double. It was the big captain who cut Leigh and the chauffeur loose.

"What's happened?"

"A German submarine crew came ashore to get petrol. They tied me up. The devils have taken my wife."

"When? How long ago?"

"Not ten minutes. Come on. They are making for Thrift Cove."

"Do you know the way?"

"I was born here. Give me a rifle, someone. I want the bayonet on it."

He started off at full speed, murder in his heart, and fifty brown figures followed.

"I say—"

"Leigh's my name."

"I say, Leigh. What if we run into the beasts and let fly? What about your wife?"

"It's just chance, man. I shall shout to her to lie down. She'd rather be dead than with them, you know."

"Perhaps."

Now, in the darkness Muller had missed the direct path to Thrift Cove and was leading his gang of petrol thieves round the valley towards Ram's Head. The night itself appeared to have developed a sudden spite against the Germans, for the sultry, overclouded sky opened in the west and let through the light of a young moon. Muller saw that he had gone astray, and with cursings from Lieutenant Otto Block, turned the party back.

"Did you hear those fellows shouting, Herr Lieutenant?"

"We ought to have shot them. But I think they have grown tired of making a noise. Go and tell Offenbach to bring the woman back to me here."

This slip of Muller's and the sudden shining through of the moon proved disastrous to the Germans, for as they trailed back to regain the main path they showed themselves against the skyline to the troops in pursuit. Moreover, the English had reached the point where the paths diverged, and the Germans were coming down towards them.

"Pass the word to extend, fix bayonets, and lie down. No man to fire until I blow my whistle."

The big man gave the order in a whisper.

"Look here, Leigh, we'll try to get them to surrender."

"I think we had better rush them."

"But what about your wife?"

"That blackguard is capable of shooting her. No; let them get close. I'll shout to her to throw herself down."

"All right. I'll pass the word along. Cold steel, and no shooting."

Leigh was trembling like an excited dog. Block and his men were within a hundred yards of them, coming down the path in single file. Leigh, straining his eyes, was able to distinguish Jasmine's white dress.

"She's in the rear—there."

"My chaps know what's wanted of them."

The file of sailors, a dozen or so, loaded with their cans, trailed along in front of the waiting Tommies before Leigh rose to his knees and gave the signal.

"Jasmine, lie down—lie down. Forward, boys, with the bayonet."

Leigh saw the white figure of his wife sink down in the dark heather. He was leaping towards her, the men charging at his heels. A few revolver shots rang out.

Block cursed them and made use of his revolver. He found himself marked down by a man whose purpose there was no mistaking.

A bullet whipped past Leigh's shoulder, a second cut the sleeve of his tunic, but before another shot was fired he had his bayonet at the German's chest.

Block threw up his arms.

"I surrender."

But there was no mercy in Amyas Leigh's eyes. He drove the steel home.

Lieutenant Block fell forward, the weight of his body wrenching the rifle out of Leigh's hands. Leigh bent over him and twisted the revolver out of his fingers to make sure that even a dying man could play no tricks. Then he stood up and looked round for his wife.

"Jasmine!"

She rose out of the heather and ran to him with outstretched hands.

"Dear, you are safe?"

"Yes."

"God be thanked. What a home-coming!"

"And what a rescue!"

Next day the U53 surrendered to an English destroyer. But, seeing that the case was complex, the great and wise silence that watches over the fortunes of England set its seal upon the incident.